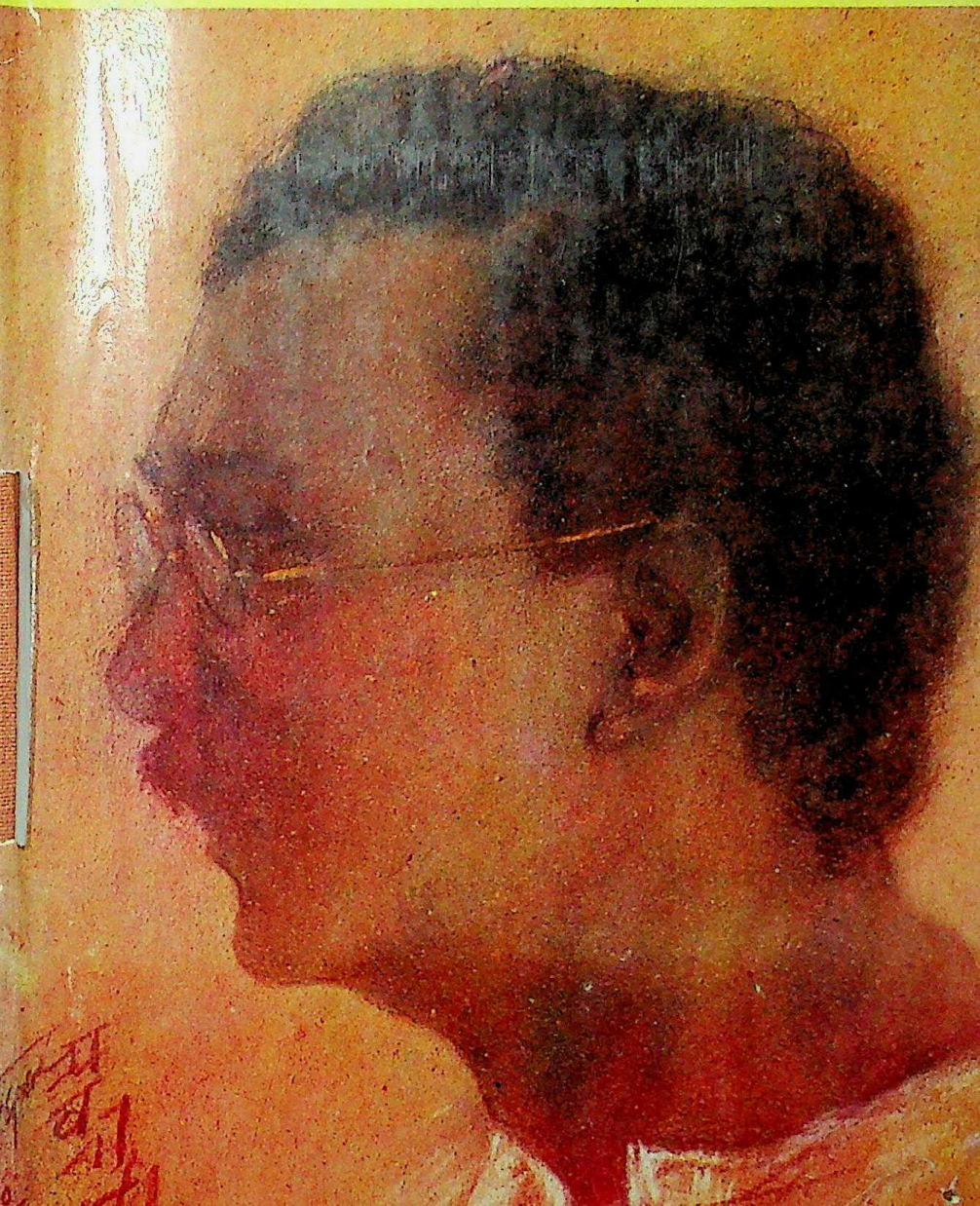
NANDALAL BOSE

Dinkar Kowshik

Acc No 1626



NANDALAL BOSE

The Doyen of Indian Art

Dinkar Kowshik

GIFTED BY
RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY LIBRARY FOUNDATION
(Estd by the Deptt of Culture)
(Government of India)
Block DD-34, Sector-1, Salt Lake City
Calcutta-700064

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

927.2244
KOW

1985 (*Saka* 1906)

© *Dinkar Kowshik, 1985*

Rs. 18.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India, A 5, Green Park, New Delhi 110 016. Photocomposed at Sona Printers, 1798, Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi 110003 and printed at Rajbandhu Industrial Company, C 61 Mayapuri Industrial Area Phase II, New Delhi 110064.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the following scholars, authors, colleagues and relatives of Acharya Nandalal Bose for their assistance in assembling material for this book. Their writings and information given at personal interviews have been most helpful: Sri Banabehari Ghosh, Sri Biswarup Bose, Sm. Gouri Bhanja, Sm. Jamuna Sen, Sri Kanai Samanta, Sri K.G. Subramanyan, Sri Panchanan Mandal, Sri Rabi Paul, Sri Sanat Bagchi, Sm. Uma Das Gupta, Sm. Amita Sen.

I am grateful to Sri Sumitendranath Tagore for permission to reproduce Acharya Nandalal's portrait by Abanindranath Tagore on the cover.

I thank Dr. L.P. Sihare, Director, National Gallery of Modern Art, for permission to use photographs of Acharya Nandalal's paintings from the collections in the National Gallery.

I record my special gratitude to Sm. Jaya Appasamy, who went through the script, edited it and brought it to its present shape.

Dinkar Kowshik

Santiniketan
28 November 1983

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page No.*
1.	Forebears and Parents	1
2.	School and College Education	6
3.	Nandalal enters the Magic Circle	11
4.	Early Laurels	16
5.	Discovery of Indian Art	20
6.	At Ajanta	26
7.	Okakura	30
8.	The Poet and the Painter	33
9.	Nandalal and Coomaraswamy	37
10.	Interim	41
11.	Ethical Moorings	50
12.	Far Eastern Voyage	56
13.	Wall Paintings	61
14.	Architecture & Museum	64
15.	Notes on His Paintings	72
16.	Art for the Community	75
17.	Depression	79
18.	Artist of the Indian National Congress	84
19.	A Humane and Kindly Being	89
20.	Nandalal and His Students	95
21.	Nandalal's Views on Art	98
22.	Gandhiji's Visit – 1945	103
23.	Admirers and Critics	106
24.	Evening Years	110
	Glossary of Indian terms and words	113
	Bibiliography	120
	Notes on Illustrations	123

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Saraswati. 1941. Tempera on paper.
2. Birth of Chaitanya. Tempera on paper.
3. Bina Badini. Haripura Congress Panel. Tempera on paper.
4. Dandi March (Bapuji). Linocut.
5. A boy with a Goat (Sahaji Path). Linocut.
6. A Peacock. Pencil on Postcard.
7. A home at Tagda. Water colour on paper.
8. Sarangiwala. Haripura Poster.
9. Head of Siva. Wash Tempera.
10. Santhal Harvest dance. Sketch.

CHAPTER I

FOREBEARS AND PARENTS

Madho, Basavan, Govardhan, Bishandas, Mansur, Mukund and Manohar are some of the artists who worked in the imperial ateliers of Akbar and Jehangir. The name "Nandalal" also has the same familiar sound, and the same fragrance of the native soil. He had the attitude of our traditional artist craftsmen who took pride in their workmanship and paid fastidious attention to finishing, which Jehangir's favourite painters evinced in the heyday of Mughal art. Jehangir records in his memoirs that by long association and study of the paintings done in the royal studios, he had developed a sensitive judgment and could tell at a glance, which work or which part of a work, was done by a particular artist. Each one had his strong points and even in a painting done by a team, it was possible to distinguish the styles of each individual artist. Nandalal too, though he comes almost four hundred years later, had the vitality and sensibility of our ancient painters. To recognise the touch of his incomparable hand it would not need a Jehangiri eye. Sure lines, strong and lancet like, stand out distinctly even in his casual sketches. Drawing was a daily ritual and a way of life with him. He saw the world around, and it would appear that he knew the

nature of a thing only when he had sketched it and netted it in a swift notation. For him to draw was to be aware. The observing eye was only a part of that process of awareness, completion came only after he had drawn it.

Another coincidence, which bears passing mention, is that many of the artists of the Mughal court ateliers were Kayasthas by caste. Nandalal too was a Kayastha and had to wear the ceremonial thread, to gain entry into temples during his South Indian tour. Nandalal belonged to the humbler rung of the caste heirarchy, and felt its tyranny as a youth.

An account of Nandalal's forebears in the three volume biography by Panchanan Mandal[1] provides an absorbing picture of eighteenth century Bengal. Life in the country was normally placid. The population grouped in various castes worked in close co-operation and the rural economy was remarkably self-sufficient. Villages grew around centres where cloth, sugar, silk, jute, and indigo were produced. These were marketed by businessmen acting as brokers to English and other European traders. Some worked as suppliers of provisions of building materials and other merchandise to the East India Company.

Nandalal's great grandfather Krishnamohan Bose, originally lived in Jejur near Tarakeswar. His quiet and modestly prosperous life was suddenly interrupted by a dacoity. Dacoities were common in those days and were often the cause of social mobility. It forced Krishnamohan and his family to leave Jejur and seek fresh avenues of livlihood elsewhere. Krishnamohan a man of integrity and strong will moved to Rajgunj Banupur in Howrah district, a place near Calcutta. He took up the business of supplying bricks for various construction projects at Fort William. In a letter from the Court of Directors to the East India Company is the following statement.

"You are in the right to have no thatched or matted houses within the fort...that whatever building you make, it be done with pucker (masonry) work, which though chargeable is cheapest on account of its duration".[2] Later when part of Fort William had to be pulled down for extensive modifications the Rev. James Long records that, "The walls were very strong being made of brick with mortar composed of brick-dust, lime, molasses and hemp, a cement still strong in 1819 when the fort was

pulled down to make way for the Custom House, the pickaxe or crow-bar was of no avail. Gun-powder was obliged to be resorted to, so strong were the buildings".[3]

This goes to show the integrity of suppliers of building materials and masons in those days.

Krishnamohan's son Govindmohan, grandfather of Nandalal, was a simple untutored householder. Unlike his father, he was content to live off the landed property he inherited. Both his sons, Yogindra and Purnachandra were thus raised in an atmosphere of rural middle class mores. While Yogindra devoted his time to managing the lands, the younger son Purnachandra studied overseership in the Sibpur College. The irrigation and road-construction wings of the Government were then engaged in building canals, reservoirs, and bridges in their effort to improve lines of communication and facilitate trade in farm-produce from the interior districts. There was, therefore, a demand for the specialised services of Surveyors. Purnachandra was a meticulous draftsman and had earned considerable experience in supervising the building of canals, roads and bridges. He accepted a job in the construction of a canal in the Diamond Harbour area, a work which was in progress during the early days of his apprenticeship. He was persuaded to accept this work by his friend, Chandrasekhar Basu.

Purnachandra's friendship with Chandrasekhar was passed on to their sons. Nandalal became a pal and playmate of Rajsekhar. The painter Nandalal and the literateur Rajsekhar came close to each other as family friends and schoolmates.

Purnachandra was not a man of learning. His training in Sibpur College had given him a practical knowledge of how to prepare scale-drawings, work out quantities and estimates for construction, plan the materials required and management of labour. His tidy habits, unostentatious living and loyalty to employers were soon rewarded. He rose later to become the manager of the large estates of the Maharaja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga.

Nandalal was born on 3rd December 1882, at Haveli Kharagpur (not to be confused with another Kharagpur in West Bengal) one of the more obscure towns in eastern Bihar. Kharagpur is situated in a picturesque area with a Wordsworthian lake district

around it. The dense forests surrounding the land gave it a sylvan atmosphere. Trees like the mahua, sal and teak were grown in profusion as timber, and the forests were sanctuaries for wild animals like the leopard, tiger, elephant and bear. Nandalal had a fund of anecdotes about the wild life encounters of his Kharagpur days and would recount these stories with relish.

Nandalal's mother Kshetramonidevi was a godfearing gentle woman wholly devoted to household chores. She had an eye for little things of beauty and would delight young Nandalal by improvising toys and dolls with ingenious skill. She was adept in carving clay moulds which were fired, and the terracotta moulds were used in stamping impressions on homemade *Sandesh* and *Chandraphuli* sweets.

Nandalal was the third child to arrive in the family of five. The eldest was brother Gokulchandra, followed by a sister, Kiran Bala. Another sister Kamala was younger than him and the youngest was Nimai, a brother — the darling of all. Children born in the middle usually learn on the anvils of experience. The eldest, being the first to arrive insist on parental attention, and when the next one arrives, the first born resents it and feels jealous. The youngest gets only a little attention and therefore often turns out to be independent and adventurous. Thus the middle child usually works quietly in his own way, ignoring the authoritative elder and the resourceful youngster. Nandalal too proved a wayfarer of the middle path.

From his early days Nandalal began taking an interest in modelling images. Images of Durga, Ganesh, elephants and bulls were often produced and could be seen in fairs and festivals. Decorating Puja pandals or Tajia structures was a form of community work and Nandalal was probably enthused by such activities. On his daily rounds to the village school, he would pass potters, carpenters and toymakers workig at their crafts. Their intimate understanding of each material and its character, their skill in manipulating the potter's wheel and virtuosity in throwing clay, or their ability to use simple instruments like the chisel was a source of constant delight to him.

Purnachandra was an affectionate father in the old-fashioned way. There was not much petting or fondling, but there existed an unspoken understanding between father and son. Sometimes

he would draw a figure of an elephant and then would go on to show its spelling. Occasionally the young boy would see the neatly worked survey drawings of canals and bridges, and would admiringly follow the elegant lettering of the written legends.

Nandalal's seemingly uneventful childhood was suffused with the flavour of Indian culture. The stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata entered into his awareness even as a child. The orthodox devout family atmosphere gave him a will and purpose. The village craftsmen kindled his intimacy with 'mano e materiale' — hand and material. A lasting patrimony was revealed by the quiet unhurried flux of nature and it gave him a calm and collected mind.

[1] Panchanan Mandal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal*, (Vol. 1; Bolpur: Rahr Gabesana Parishad, December 1982).

[2] Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, (Calcutta, Firma KLM (P) Ltd. 1974), Chapter 1.

[3] Rev. James Long, *Calcutta and its' neighbourhood*, (Editor: Sankar Sen Gupta, Indian Publications, Calcutta, 1974), p. 188.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

Nandalal's schooling was chequered by frequent changes and he never felt at ease with the written word or with the logic of numbers. He was at home with the visual form, and with the tactile sensibility of clay and with the ever-changing mystery of the seasons. These verities were real and in the words of Valmiki as palpable as "an *amalaki* held in one's hand". A fairly long training period in the vernacular middle school at Kharagpur, gave Nandalal some well needed grounding in the elements of language, history, some arithmetic and a reasonably good knowledge of spoken Hindi. Kharagpur-Haveli was a district of Bihar and the language of instruction and common speech was Hindi. Apart from this, some of the school teachers were Muslims; and they provided a streak of Urdu flourish to the usual Bihari Hindi. Nandalal had some opportunity to keep up his Bengali with a tutor specially appointed by his father. This arrangement was felt necessary for the new Bengali families who liked to maintain a link with the mainstream of their own culture.

Nandalal moved to Calcutta in the year 1897, for his high school studies. He started his lessons in the Central Collegiate

School, and Kantichandra Ghosh was one of his classmates. Kantichandra who later became famous as the translator of Omar Khayyum was quite a troublesome lad in his school days. He was always engaged in inventing novel pranks, to embarass the teachers and students. Nandalal, though a friend of Kanti, remained usually off stage as a passive spectator. He nonetheless showed enthusiasm, gave promptings and encouragement to the more volatile Kanti. Life in such collegiate schools was probably rather unimaginative and drab to youths who were not motivated towards academic discipline. Each teacher entered his class, and without waiting to sense whether the students were receptive or indifferent began to lecture in a torrent of words, the lessons for the day. The teachers usually made no effort to engage the students' heart and interest in the academic programme. At the end of each year, examinations were conducted, the usual percentage of students passing the examinations was quite low. The lower the percentage the more prestigious was the institution. Such was the academic climate of the times. Nandalal however managed to clear the entrance examination in 1902 and continued his college studies in the same institution. There was not much pleasure in these study sessions and Nandalal was forcing himself to stare at the books of English, Sanskrit, or history, while his mind journeyed over the wide wide world of fantasy. The book containing Wordsworth's poems was soon illuminated with drawings of lakes and forests. Since the college was devoted to liberal education and not fine arts, Nandalal failed to earn his annual promotion to the second year.

At this time Nandalal had crossed twenty, and there was a brief and happy interlude when he was married to Sudhiradevi. Nandalal's mother Kshetramonidevi it appears had exchanged promises with Sudhiradevi's mother, that her daughter would be her future daughter-in-law. True to the given word, even though Kshetramonidevi had passed away, the marriage was solemnised in June 1903. Sudhiradevi's father Prakashchandra Pal was a close friend and colleague of Purnachandra and the wedding was celebrated with due pomp and festivity in Calcutta. Sudhiradevi, a young and elegant girl of twelve thus came to be the life-partner of the painter Nandalal. She had an impressive personality. Her fair, tall frame and fine features gave her an

engaging presence. She looked taller than Nandalal and in years to come her drive and flair for taking decisions was an asset to the Bose family.

In his anxiety to acquire some qualifications Nandalal then joined another college, the General Assemblies Institution and resumed his studies. Here too, he failed to qualify for promotion. With renewed perseverance he switched over to Metropolitan College, where again he had to wade through the same course. He would listen to an unending stream of words that flooded the class. The verbal acrobatics of the teachers should have left him a little amused, if not stunned. Little did it arouse his visual imagination. Here too the same fate awaited his trials at clearing college tests. In a mood of indecision he wrote to his grand father-in-law, that he would like to join the Art-School. His father, then away in Darbhanga, had delegated the responsibilities of guiding him to Nandalal's parents-in-law. Prompt was the reaction; Art was not considered a respectable career. A college graduate was more sought after in the job market. Law, Medicine or Engineering were thought of as professions respectable for middle class youth. Lawyers were in the forefront when it came to financial rewards, political leadership or journalism. Reluctantly Nandalal sought admission to the Presidency College joining its Commerce section in 1905. Here he had to face another set of subjects, all new, all equally boring. Commercial geography, precis writing, typing, commercial accounting, each more tiresome than the other. He was thoroughly disillusioned and disheartened in his attempts to get a degree and acquit himself with any semblance of success. These trials and travails were frustrating. He was already twenty two, a married man and a worried man.

If his academic studies brought him no pleasure, his pursuits in art kept him busy and enraptured. Between 1897, when he first came to Calcutta for his high school studies and 1905, when he abandoned all hope of an academic qualification, Nandalal was a witness to the multi-levelled renaissance in the cultural life of Bengal. Sri Ramakrishna's passing away in the recent past had not dimmed the lustre and magnetism of his spiritual halo. Swami Vivekananda was then travelling around the world and bringing fresh laurels in praise of the Indian heritage. Literary

figures like Bankim Chandra and Michael Madhusudan were in the vanguard of the revival. Rabindranath was the rising star of the century. By this time his name was widely known as the foremost poetic phenomenon of India. The literary journal *Pravasi* had within a short time gained wide circulation among the educated middle class, a class which had succeeded, in its turn in shaping the trend of the media. Media moulded political and social awareness, as such it was a power to reckon with. Numerous journals covered a wide area of interests, from political discussions, and economic analyses, to poetry, history and studies of ancient texts. Besides articles many known painters and promising talents found a forum in which their work was presented in reproductions.

Young Nandalal with such an exhilerating air around him looked forward to the new issues of *Pravasi*. His sole intent was to study the picture plates that were published in these monthly journals. His real education began with occasional encounters with works of art. Rummaging around old book shops in North Calcutta he would brouse through foreign illustrated magazines to discover reproductions of European old masters like Raphael. In these years he copied some of the plates and thus kept up his practice in painting. His initial acquaintance with the works of Ravi Varma and Abanindranath was through *Pravasi*. The monthly magazine in its first year of publication reproduced pictures from the Ajanta murals, Ravi Varma and sculptures of Mhatre and in the following year of Dhurandhar, and Abanindranath. The paintings *Sujata and the Buddha* and *Vajra mukut* by Abanindranath left an abiding mark on the young painter, and he started working on similar themes. His own work *Mahasweta* was done under the reigning influence of this master. All this was done quietly, in the solitude of his poky living quarters. His repeated failures at college only strengthened his will to choose painting as a career. The advice of his elders failed to swerve him from the destined path. Atul Mitra one of Nandalal's cousins lived in the same house, and was studying draftsmanship in the Government Art School. Nandalal started taking lessons from him in model drawing, still life and other techniques. He was arming himself with the preliminary training which he thought would help him to secure admission to the art school.

Having come to his academic tether's end, he implored his guardians to give him a last chance to study art, and it was truly the chance of a life time.

CHAPTER III

NANDALAL ENTERS THE MAGIC CIRCLE

A young man in the neighbourhood was a student in the art school. He would regale his listeners with stories about his teachers, especially Abanindranath. Nandalal was already reading about this master in the press in glowing terms. The reports of the award he won in the Delhi exhibition of 1902-3 were widely known. The catalogue published as a guide to this vast and sprawling show, mentioned the following: "Abanindranath Tagore of Calcutta sends through the Principal of the School of Art, Calcutta, three pictures, that were so much appreciated as to receive a silver medal."[1]

Nandalal poured over the reproductions of Abanindranath's paintings as they appeared in the Bengali journals. He felt a certain personal affinity with him, and desired in his heart to win him as his master. He also saw the works of painters like Dhurandhar, Annoda Bagchi, Bamacharan Bandopadhyaya and others. But their work did not touch any chord within him. Yet on seeing Abanindranath's work he felt a thrill of kinship. The men and women in Abanindranath's paintings did not seem to be aliens in a native garb, they were individuals of this land. The

Buddha and *Sujata*, *Shahjehan* or *Nala Damayanti* belonged to this country in flesh and blood, and moved with natural grace. *Sujata* or *Damayanti* wore their sarees with casual ease. The works of Ravi Varma or Dhurandhar appeared affected and stagey by comparison. For Nandalal the decision was simple, emotionally he had no other choice, except to pay his homage to Abanindranath and accept him as his guru.

The young man, who was a student of the art school, agreed to take him to Abanindranath. On a fateful day in 1906, he stood in the presence of the master, shy, silent, but full of excitement. Abanindranath looked with amusement masking it with a grave face and peering through his glasses remarked "Looks like a truant from school; perhaps being unable to study, he wishes to try his hand at art! What have you studied so far?"

"Not school — but college — failed".

"Really I can't believe my ears. I would like to see the certificate".

Thus ended the first encounter. Mustering courage, Nandalal visited him a second time with a bundle of pictures, drawings and a certificate obtained from the college office. Principal Havell saw these and singled out the work *Mahasweta* for special mention. He was passed on to Lala Iswariprasad for conducting the usual admission test. Iswariprasad was an accomplished painter of the Patna style. He was well versed in the traditional techniques of miniature painting and was craftsman adept at preparing indigenous colours and brushes of the finest kind. The Lala's employment in the art school was largely due to Principal Havell's insistance that art education in India should no more look back to British models. Indian art had its own roots and its own distinct flavour. Earlier he had persuaded Abanindranath to join the art school fraternity by offering him the Vice-Principalship. Abanindranath was of a different temperament. He was averse to time-bound programmes, regulated attendance and the conventional discipline of class rooms. Art for him was a quest which flowered in an air of freedom and spontaneity. Havell, a very sympathetic and kindly disposed Englishman, assured every facility and consideration to this aristocratic and whimsical genius. His worth was apparent to the perceptive and discerning eye of Havell. Abanindranath too had a great regard

for Havell. The role of Havell in persuading him to search for an individual original idiom free from the ballast of European conventions was evident, and for this Abanindranath considered Havell his Guru. In one of his letters to Havell written in later years he says:

> I hope by this time you have got the copy of the Omar Khayyam with the original illustrations. My *Dakshina* which you so kindly consented to accept.
>
> I really believe in the old saying — a man is without *Siddhi* so long as he remains without a *Guru* — my mind is now at peace with everything and everybody, in gaining my Guru I have gained all.
>
> Yours sincerly,
> Sd:
> A.N. Tagore[2]

Nandalal started on his test with appropriate ceremony which was considered auspicious. All good endeavours were initiated with homage to *Siddhidata* Ganesha. The elephant headed divinity was the traditional shield from evils and mishaps. He bestowed fulfilment. Nandalal did not wish to make a wrong beginning. After scrutinizing his work, Lala Iswariprasad reported "He wields a mature hand". He was thus admitted to the fold of art-students.

The programme of studies in the art-school was quite novel and different in many respects from other art schools such as those of Bombay or Madras. Havell started a new section, a department of Indian art, while among other departments, there was one of Fine arts, meaning Western Art, and another for Sculpture. The Indian art section evoked considerable adverse criticism from the uninformed press and the public. It was considered a retrograde step designed to keep Indian talent away from the modern western techniques of painting and portraiture. The West stood for progress and anything western by implication was progressive. But with the pioneering zeal of Harvell, Abanindranath's achievement in painting, as well as that of his select band of disciples, the tide turned and soon winds of admiration began to blow. The new curriculum included various

crafts like stained glass, gesso work, frescoe painting, stencil cutting and printing.

For Nandalal, his hands spoke more eloquently than his tongue and he became wholly engrossed in studio work. Abanindranath had his own studio in one of the larger halls of the school where he painted or instructed. Students had free access to the master, who delighted his audience with anecdotes, mythological tales, and humorous sallies. He was an inimitable conversationalist and much of his teaching or guidance was through such informal talks. What he said was often a soliloquy or loud thinking.

Abanindranath would go round the class and encourage the students to work on their own, from imagination. He frowned on those who preferred the easy way out by copying pictures done by others or working on studies from models in which there was no effort at discovering painterly solutions. Originality was his watchword and he reserved his praise for those who showed invention as well as observation.

The early years of the decade were filled with excitement. The British decision to partition Bengal was an unkind act causing an emotional injury that stirred the people of the province into a strident protest. Rabindranath too, the doyen of the Bengali intelligentsia raised his voice against it. He wrote songs and lead marches and processions in the streets of Calcutta. Abanindranath painted his celebrated work *Banga mata* at this time. It was later re-named *Bharat-Mata* by Sister Nivedita. Indian youth was fired with the longing for the glories of free India. Eminent historians like Jadunath Sarkar were interpreting our history with a sense of pride in the splendour of the past. Nandalal too must have been stirred by this fervour. The atmosphere of the times inspired him to create a distinct personal idiom that grew as a response to the national ethos.

During those hectic days, Sister Nivedita was one of the most ardent builders of India's national image. She spoke with a voice of authority.[3] Her earlier training in painting and her later discipleship with Swami Vivekananda gave her an insight into Indian culture. Her association with Havell, Abanindranath and Coomaraswamy and the study of Buddhist and Hindu art and its legends gave her a fair grounding in art history. She was a

remarkable woman who devoted her vast reserves of energy for spreading the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. She had an impressive presence, and when she moved in her spotless white dress, wearing a *Rudraksha mala,* she seemed like the personification of serenity. Abanindranath was all praise for her commanding appearance. He was wont to say, that, when Sister Nivedita appeared in any social gathering she looked like *Parvati* incarnate, the legendary daughter of Mount Himalaya. So pure and so overpowering. The Sister was an able writer, and for some years she provided extensive notes and guidance on the paintings that appeared in *Modern Review.* These writings of critical appreciation helped to raise the level of aesthetic awareness and create a favourable audience for the artist community in general. Nandalal's meeting with the Sister left on him the impression of her single-minded devotion to a cause.

Whenever possible, she would visit the art school and encourage the budding talents there. Nandalal looked forward to her comments and critical observations. He knew that for any young aspiring artist it was essential that his work should be seen, analysed and encouraged. Criticism did not wilt a talent when it had the inner will and urge to flower. Even observing her among them in her sprightly grace was an event for Nandalal. He sometimes referred to the source of his inspiration in creating images like *Uma's Tapasya* as being in Nivedita.

1. Sir George Watt and Percy Brown, *Indian Art at Delhi 1903;* being the official catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition 1902-1903, (Calcutta: Supt. of Government Printing, India) p. 488.
2. Abanindranath Tagore's letter to E.B. Havell. dt. 8.6.1911 (Santinketan, *Visvabharati Quarterly* Vol. no. 1980-81), p. 219.
3. B. Chakravarty, *Sister Nivedita,* (New Delhi, National Book Trust India, 1975), p. 5.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY LAURELS

Nandalal was securely on his path and from now on (1906-7) there would be no turning back and no difficulties to dread. He and his colleague Surendranath Ganguly were close to their master and Abanindranath would say with pride Nando and Suren were his right and left hands. Their work was seen, encouraged and critically reviewed. If there were comments or critical observations they were not intended to harm their desire to excel. From the second year of his apprenticeship in the art school, Nandalal was granted a freeship, no fees to pay and what was more, he earned a stipend, which was considerable for those days.

Surendranath Ganguly was few years younger than Nandalal. This poor Brahmin boy had joined the weaving class, under Principal Havell. But soon gave up the shuttle to take up his brush under Abanindranath. Nandalal used to speak highly about this talented colleague; there was a healthy rivalry between them. Abanindranath was a past-master in the art of story-telling. In his art-school studio he often recounted tales of Rajput chivalry and romance, and the small circle of his disciples would listen in silence, holding their breath at the critical

moments of suspense. These tales were part of their instruction. They were expected to inspire the themes and images for the designs of their paintings.

Painting thus grew around a thematic content. Form, composition and colour were just the visible counter-part of content. The story was as important as the technique of painting. Throughout history, painting has been illustration in the best sense of the term. Illustration in its etymological sense means to be in light, to be illuminated, to be clear. It is concerned with brightening or making manifest any thing or action. The mural of the Buddha, Yashodhara and Rahul with his alms bowl in the Ajanta caves, is an illustration. So are paintings of the various Jataka stories, that adorn the walls there. Similar works characterise the Horiyuji temple in Japan, the Tun Huang caves in China, Ravenna or the Sistine Chapel in Italy. Many great paintings have been illustrations gaining their vitality from their thematic grandeur.

There are critics who frown on paintings done in this manner. They aver with Gertrude Stein, that a painting is a painting: meaning a good painting concerns itself with the excellence of drawing; richness of colour and with the dynamics of composition. Subject matter is an intrusion and is really a dispensable aspect of art. But this view came to be held much later.

Abanindranath's teaching was very unorthodox. It was a novel way of awakening the dormant talent of the aspirer. His words on the eve of an autumn recess to the student gathering bears the stamp of his personality and reveals his style of imparting art education.

> "You will not get the beloved at the cost of few smiles. The muse who is our hearts' treasure, cannot be gained in a playful way by frivolous or careless activity. We want to win the deity of our heart by laughter and neglect. Kabir has said 'Yearning is (like a) great Sultan. Person not moved by any yearning is as (dead as) a graveyard.
>
> "Art is not to be attained by putting Him on the variegated pages of monthly magazines that flaunt assorted essays. He is not to be won so easily. Nor will He come at your call uncomplaining, like the mercenary teacher, who arrives at the art school, chewing betel leaves at leisure. He that is the treasure of our

efforts, demands sustained hard work. He asks of us an unwavering hope, a mind collected in contemplation."[1]

Such a talk was not random advice or a routine exhortion. His allusion to the futility of putting art on the pages of monthly journals that carried assorted material was aimed at some of his students like Nandalal, Surendranath and others who were getting easy publicity which he felt was not particularly healthy. He considered that the pursuit of art required intense search, a restless longing and unwavering faith. Art was a difficult God. His blessings could not be obtained by flattery in magazine articles.

Nandalal's painting activity was in full swing. In the exhibition organised by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, he showed two works *Sati* and *Siva* and *Sati*.Surendranath Ganguly also exhibited his *Flight of Laxman Sen*. Both of them won awards of five hundred rupees each — not an inconsiderable sum in those days.

The Indian Society of Oriental Art was an organisation formed in 1907 by some English enthusiasts of Indian culture and few Indian artists and scholars. Sir John Woodroffe, the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, was the moving spirit behind the activities of the society. His principal interest was in the esoteric literature of Tantric cults. Other members of the group were Thornton, an engineer by profession and an amateur painter, and Norman Blunt an influential member of the English community in Calcutta. Sister Nivedita who was interested in art movements was also a member. The two Tagores, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, became active members, their works were spearheading the newly ushered Bengal School. Ordhendu Coomar Ganguly also became one of its influential members. He later became editor of the prestigious art journal *'Roopam'* which was published under the auspices of the Society. Apart from an annual programme of exhibitions and publications the Society took considerable interest in promoting Indian art and artists.

The award winning paintings by Nandalal elicited praise and critical acclaim from several quarters. A report in the *La Review a Parisian* a fortnightly journal carried the news: that the Japanese art journal *Kokka* published the reproduction of one outstanding painting in water colour, by an artist Nandalal Bose.

It further stated that last winter at the instance of the Oriental Society of Art, an exhibition of oriental paintings was shown here (Paris). There a painting titled *Kaikeyi* attracted everybody's attention, and praise. The examples of the new art movement have roused much interest. They show a waning of English influence, and an advance towards a national ethos. In art too, India is heading towards freedom and self-rule.[2]

1907-8 was an eventful year in Nandalal's life. His young wife Sudhiradevi gave birth to his first daughter, Gauri, at Kharagpur. Her name was in tune with the paintings he was working on at this time. "Lakshmi had stepped into the house" said the elders of the family. And truly it was so. The same year brought him the coveted award, and his painting was sold.

In the general rejoicing on the birth of Gauri, Nandalal planned a study tour of northern India. He did not let his first success lull him to rest. He felt he had miles to go, and hills to scale before he could think of settling down. He was aware that he was still in the early part of his training and his friend Surendranath was a strong rival in the class. He proposed to work hard and acquaint himself with the vast Indian art heritage. In the words of Abanindranath the *Silpa Devata* had to be propitiated with unswering devotion, that included the sustained study of visual facts and a knowledge of our classical traditions. These had to be lived afresh through personal experience.

1. Abanindranath Tagore, *Silper Devata*, Pravasi, Bengali, Kartik 1316. p. 481-2.
2. Jyotirindianath Tagore, *Notes on art*, Pravasi, Bengali Jyestha 1316.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERY OF INDIAN ART

The youthful art student, launched on a pilgrimage to discover the land of his birth, he desired to see first the ancient and historical sites of art. He longed to breathe the air that was once breathed by the Buddha, Ashoka, Krishna, and by the monarchs that illumined the pages of our history.

He found a resourceful companion in Priyanath Sinha who was indispensible during the tour because of his tact and contacts with people. Wherever they went Priyanath would search for a suitable host and often find someone who would provide them with hospitality.

The first stop on their itinerary was Patna. Nandalal had learnt that one of the Seths by name Jalan had a collection of Rajput and Jain paintings and other art and craft objects. They spent considerable time studying and taking notes of the art-treasures on view. From Patna they proceeded to Varanasi. At Varanasi Nandalal did not forget the rituals any Hindu yearns to perform. They visited the temple of Visvanath and bathed in the sacred Ganges. Varanasi delighted him, the eternal Ganges, the flights of steps on her banks, the incessant flow of pilgrims chanting their prayers, the ringing temple bells, and the round bamboo

umbrellas, standing at varying angles, all this was visually fascinating. Nandalal fell in love with Varanasi. In later years he visited the place again and again, and liked it even more. But the highlight of their stay was Sarnath, where two thousand years ago the Buddha had preached his *Dhamma Chakra pravartana.* The Dhameka Stupa was in disrepair, but the designs and carvings on the waist of the Stupa were still in their full glory. The pages of his sketch book were filled sketching their elegant intricacies.

After spending sometime looking around Lucknow, they travelled to Agra. In the presence of the famed Taj Mahal, he tried to analyse his feelings. The form and structure were doubtless elegant, clear in design and alluring in symmetry. Still somehow he could not feel within him a thrill, a sense of catharsis, of being swept off his feet. The beauty of the Taj Mahal appeared, aloof, abstract and symmetrical. It needed the illumination of moonlight to bathe it in an aura of unity. He could understand his reactions later when he visited Sasaram and saw Sher Shah's tomb. Here he was overpowered by the massive magnificance of the structure. There was no allurement of marble, the sheer juxtaposition and counterbalance of volumes was what made the tomb a lasting testimony of Indian architecture.

On the return journey he camped in Gaya. His admiration for the Buddha Tathagata, took him to the great temple complex and the ancient Bodhi tree. The railings of Buddha Gaya caught his eye and he made several studies of it. Another major reason for going to Gaya was a religious one. Worship and offerings of *Pinda* for the peace of departed ancestors, was considered the filial duty of a devout Hindu, and Nandalal did not wish to neglect it. He was not bound by Sastraic injunctions, but he was given to superstitions that were then in general currency. A cat crossing the path, a crow on the house top, movement of the left or right eyelid would be an omen with some meaning. At a later date he writes in a letter to Asitkumar Haldar:[1]

> I am really happy to note that you have managed to find a neat corner for your studio in Santiniketan. Isn't that nice? You better get a tall bamboo pole, and hang at its top a few things like a torn shoe, a worn out broom or a broken basket to ward off the evil eye. Start your day's work with hands folded

Cost:... 181=
Date:.....

in prayer. By nature I am a little superstitious, as you well know.

Nandalal's Northern tour came to an end with his return to Kharagpur Haveli and to Sudhiradevi the young mother waiting for the return of the prodigal. Back in Calcutta Nandalal found himself once again in another group that was planning an extensive tour of South India. He was by then considering the wherewithals for such a venture for a second time. The party was led by Ordhendu Coomar Ganguly, a young and assertive advocate of the Calcutta Bar (briefly referred to earlier as one of the active members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art). O.C. as he was to be known later, was then training himself in art history and criticism. He was a Brahmin by caste, and his party consisted of Radhakumud Mukherjee — historian and sociologist. Nandalal, the only non-Brahmin of the group had to accept a lower position because of his caste and also because his expenses were borne by O.C. and his group. He often felt the discrimination at meal time or during entries into orthodox temple complexes. He had to put on the sacred thread on many embarassing occasions. Kayasthas were entitled to the thread by religious sanction and he availed of it. He was eager to get the best out of the bargain and so accepted his position without complaint, he was after all on the path to self-education. Where else would he get such an opportunity?

Their first stop was at Puri and Bhubaneshwar. The splendid works of mediaeval Orissan temple architecture were studied, discussed and sketched. The scholars in the party spent hours in analytical talk and in discussing history. Nandalal on the other hand, chose to grasp the sculpture with his eyes and draw the visual, tactile subtleties of sculpture and architecture. His innate suspicion about theoretical articulations concerning art, was probably rooted in these early aural inflictions. He often wondered how one could speak of sculpture and painting which were expressive activities of the hand and mind. Words seemed only to screen and befuddle the immediacy of vision. But such private unspoken musings were shrewdly camouflaged behind a knowing smile.

In their next halt, the group visited Madras and the temples in the surrounding area. The experience of Mahabalipuram was

truly profound. Nandalal was stirred by the natural elegance and unadorned dignity of Pallava sculptures an admiration that was to last all his life. The Pallava and Chola sculptures on the temple facades, the inimitable bronzes of Nataraja, Parvati, Sunderamurti were to move him very deeply.

Nandalal was impressed by his North-Indian tour and he showed considerable enthusiasm about the image of the Buddha at Sarnath and the carved railings at Buddha Gaya. He also thought highly of Sher Shah's tomb at Sasaram. But his response to the geometrical or floral encrustations of Islamic architecture was comparatively cool. Most of his paintings illustrate non-Islamic themes. Sati, Kaikeyi, Parthasarathi, Padmini, Dhritarashtra, Arjuna, were the subjects of his pictures. On the other hand his Guru Abanindranath revelled in the atmosphere of feudal aristocracy, and its Islamic aura of refined luxury. He preferred to paint Shahjahan, Alamgir, Omar Khayyam and pictures on similar themes. Abanindranath used Urdu and Persian script or its imitation to lend an exotic quality to his work. And even in cuisine, he showed a preference for 'moglai' dishes such as Biryani, Kabab and Kofta. Nandalal's liking for Hindu and Buddhist themes, was further deepened by his encounter with South Indian art. The Siva Nataraja in his cosmic *Tandava* dance, was a moving concept and the young artist felt its enormous power. The elegant and asymmetrical temple structures of Kanchipuram, Tanjavur and Madurai had more meaning aesthetically than the famed Taj Mahal of Agra. The Shore temple at Mahabalipurm or the temples that raised their *'shikharas'* on the landscapes of the southern plains appeared to him the epitome of the Indian vision.

On his return to Calcutta in September 1908 he resumed his studies in the art school. Now his armoury was loaded, and he was in full command of the territory. In his last year of art school studies Nandalal kept up his performance. Many of the paintings of the school of Abanindranath were taken to Simla for the second exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. This exhibition was planned to bring the works of the new movement to the notice of a wider community of art connoisseurs. Abanindranath's paintings illustrating the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam was the chief attraction of the show. Simla, a popular hill station

was a summer resort for high British officials, the maharajas of various native States and affluent fashionable aristocrats. Naturally the works were admired by the press and public. The Viceroy's award went to an oil painting — a painting of a monsoon evening, by Jaminiprakash Ganguly. Jaminiprakash was related to Abanindranath whom he would refer to as uncle Aban. Both of them had been companions in their art studies with the European painters Ghilardi and Palmer. After their student days they had parted company in matters of style. Abanindranath evolved a personal style, combining western drawing with eastern colour. While Jaminiprakash continued his work in the western method and medium. He taught in the art school, and later replaced Abanindranath as Vice-Principal under Percy Brown. Along with the works of Abanindranath and Jaminiprakash, Nandalal and Surendranath also showed their work. Nandalal himself travelled to Simla to see the exhibition. He must have been quite amused at the fashionable spectators who went round the spacious halls, more to be seen than to see. In his quiet way he could not have failed to notice the gaping chasm between the artist and society. As was his wont, his only reference to his visit to Simla was "I was also present there".

Back in Calcutta, he had several opportunities to come across some good examples of popular art, variously called Bazar paintings, folk paintings, or, pats, of Kalighat. Abanindranath's personal collection had some charming examples that had a naive simplicity and earthy homour. For sometime Nandalal tried his hand at creating pat paintings in the manner of Kalighat. He also visited some of these painters like Nibaran Ghosh. He admired the sureness of line in their drawings. These painters drew their pictures in a matter of minutes. He sometimes recounted his early experiments in the 'pat' style with amusement.

"I thought, well let me also do some folk art in the village milieu. I will live in the countryside, sell by the roadside and earn my living. It would be great fun, and an adventure. I started painting on rough paper, themes such as 'snake and mongoose, or illustrating folk sayings such as 'If a bel fruit ripens, what would the crow gain?' 'How often can a bald man go under a bel tree?' etc. These I sold by displaying them in a grocer's shop. My daily earnings were not inconsiderable. Eight annas on an aver-

age and even a rupee when I was lucky. All this adventure came to nothing when I met Aban Babu, in Calcutta. He saw a bundle of rolled pictures under my arm. These were the unsold folk-art pieces of my rural stay. Without further ado, he bought the whole lot, paying many times more than the village price. Thus ended my adventure of trying to live like a rural 'patua'!"[2]

1. Panchanan Mandal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal*, quoting a letter of Nandalal to Asit Kumar Haldar of 1915, p. 493.
2. Panchanan Mandal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal*, p. 395.

CHAPTER VI

AT AJANTA

Lady Herringham an elderly woman who was a careful and meticulous artist had known Principal Havell as a friend of her husband and also as an enthusiast of Indian art. After seeing Griffith's copies reproduced in the volume on Ajanta, she felt that the reproductions were probably not faithful to the originals, primarily because the medium used in copying was oils. The murals in the caves of Ajanta were in water-tempera. Oil was a heavy medium and not easily amenable to free movement of the brush. With Havell's encouragement, she undertook to make fresh copies of these murals. She travelled to India with two assistants, Miss Dorothy Larcher and Miss Luke, arriving here in December 1909. Sister Nivedita who had taken a keen interest in this project of resucitating the murals wanted that some Indian painters should benefit by such studies too. As one of the active associates of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, she prevailed on the Society to sponsor Nandalal and Asitkumar for copying assignments under Lady Herringham. Sister was a resolute woman and after arranging for their travel tickets and incidental needs, she sent them to Ajanta. The expenses on their account were borne by Abanindranath and Gaganendranath.

Nandalal and Asitkumar reached Ajanta and joined Lady Herringham's team there. The Nizam's government had arranged for their lodging and security. Ajanta, in those days was a remote hill area far away from urban centres. The forests around were not without wild fauna. This necessitated guards at the caves and at the camping sites.

Nandalal was overwhelmed at the very first sight by the profound beauty of these murals. Nothing he had seen earlier was comparable to these waves of visual form, that appeared to emerge and recede on the dim walls of the deep resonating caves. In the still silence of the interiors a profound drama, an intensely unique experience was unfolded, spreading from corner to corner, on the ceilings and over the pillars in colours, in sculpted forms and in flowered designs. In the first shock of excitement Nandalal did not know where or how to begin. But the methodical and practical mind of Lady Herringham found for the painters some selected parts of the murals to copy. Here Nandalal's sessions of learning from the original springs of Indian art were resumed with vigour. Till now he had seen only the splendours of architecture and sculpture in his North and South Indian tours. He had seen the forms of sculpted images at Konarak, Mahabalipuram, Sarnath and Buddha Gaya. These were in solid volumes tactile, rounded and full of vitality. But here at Ajanta the figures were released from the grossness of stone, they were lithe, and mobile and filled with movement — walking, dan[illegible] conversing, flying, praying, in meditation and in every co[illegible] able attitude. The total life-experience seemed to have bee[illegible] densed in episodes from the life of the Buddha. The paintings appeared as if the words from Bana's *Kadambari* were transformed into pictures. So striking were the parallels:

> There is a city named Ujjayani. The proudest gem of the three worlds, the very birth place of the Golden age...The painted halls that deck it are filled with gods and demons, siddhas, Gandharvas, genii and snakes....The city stretches like a suburb with its long houses; it bears in painted halls the mirror of all forms:[1]

Lady Harringham's enthusiasm and devoted work was in itself a lesson, and even though her English was difficult to understand for Indian ears, Nandalal instinctively picked up enough to

know the core and substance of her talk. During Christmas week Sister Nivedita accompanied by the Scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abala Bose and Ganen Brahmachari visited the Ajanta Camp and made enquiries about their food and comforts. The Sister left behind Ganen Brahmachari populalrly known as Maharaj, to look after the arrangements. Christmas ended in a mood of exhilaration. The artists' spirits were revived and they picked up their brushes with renewed vigour. Lady Herringham's response to these murals was characteristic:

> To me the art is of a primitive, not decadent nature, struggling hard for fresh expression. The artists had a complete command of posture; their seated and floating poses especially are of great interest. Their knowledge of types and positions, gestures and beauties of hands is amazing. Many racial types are rendered; the features are often elaborately studied and of high breeding and one might call it stylistic breeding. The drawing of foliage and flowers is very beautiful. In some pictures considerable impetus of movement of different kinds is well suggested. Some of the schemes of colours compositions are most remarkable and interesting, and there is great variety. There is no other really fine portrayal of a dark coloured race by themselves.

As the work gathered momentum, two more artists from Calcutta were requisitioned. Venkatappa and Samarendranath Gupta, both disciples of Abanindranath, and a few years junior to Nandalal in age and in class joined the copying team, and the work progressed with gusto. Ajanta, in those days, was a place visited only by distinguished people. It had not turned into a tourist haunt, where school-children were taken in file. During their stay, the Governor of Bombay was to visit the caves, and the police intelligence were put on the alert. The place had to be safe for the gubernatorial visitor. The Bengali appearance of the Calcutta members was itself suspect. For the police, every Bengali was a terrorist. There had been several incidents all over the country and some English officials in higher posts had fallen victim. There was an overall air of suspicion especially when it concerned Bengali youths. Lady Herringham was told that during the period of the Governor's visit, the Bengalis should be sent away to a camp on a distant hill. First they refused, but lady Her-

ringham prevailed on them to leave for her sake, and in order to assuage their feelings, went part of the way with them. The first camp at Ajanta came to a close after three months of sustained team work by the six artists and Lady Herringham herself. It was indeed a rewarding experience and an unforgettable lesson for Nandalal.

1. C.M. Ridding, *Bana's Kadambari*, London, 1896; p. 210.
2. Lady C.J. Herringham, *Ajanta*, volume of text London, Oxford University Press, 1915, p. 18.

CHAPTER VII

OKAKURA

Kakuzo Okakura Tensin, 1863-1913 was a colourful figure in renaissant Japan. Count Okakura as he was known then, took active part in the art movements ofhis times, and for some period headed many organisations like Kang Kai and Biju-tsu-in. He attempted to stem the imitation of the West in Japanese art and life. He was president of the Archaeological Reforms Society of Japan, and had studied the uninterrupted traditions in the art of painting, of *Ikebana*, *Bonzai*, of Japanese Gardening and of Tea Rituals. He was thus an admirable ambassador of the values of Eastern culture.

His first visit to India in 1902 was on a specific mission. He had come to persuade Swami Vivekananda to undertake a lecture tour to Japan. He had contacted him through Miss Macleod, an American admirer of Swamiji. Swamiji's health was not at all good, and he had premonitions of the impending end. On the advice of his disciples, he refrained from undertaking this ardous tour. Okakura was not aware of Swamiji's condition. During his visit, he also met Sister Nivedita and accompanied her to the Mayavati Ashram in Almora during the summer months of 1902.

In India, Okakura was the guest of Surendranath Tagore at his Park Street residence. He was also a regular visitor to Jorasanko,

and had followed with enthusiasm, the air of resurgence of those early years of the century. The new art movement spearheaded by Abanindranath, struck him as a genuine expression of indigenous culture. his impatience with the overbearing invasion of Western values in the life of Eastern countries made him associate with some anarchist movements, planned as a terrorist reply to the acts of the British Raj. In this he was in good company with Sister Nivedita. Her Irish background and the history of Ireland's struggle for freedom against English domination, lent a keen edge to her aspirations. India too was in bondage, not unlike Ireland and elicited all sympathy and encouragement in her fight for liberation. Count Okakura and Sister Nivedita trained some young men to make incendiary materials and weapons during this terrorist upsurge. Many of the chemicals for such clandestine uses came from the science laboratory of Jagadish Chandra Bose.

Okakura returned to his country after a few months stay in India only to learn of the passing away of the Swami Vivekanada on 4th July 1902. He had grown to love India and considered it a watershed of Eastern culture. He wanted India and Japan to be more closely knit for a common good. 'Asia is one' was his favourite slogan. On his return, he sent two outstanding Japanese painters to India, as cultural ambassadors. They were Yokohama Taikan and Hisida and were welcome guests of the painter brothers, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath at Jorasanko. Nandalal, at this time was still a college student, and had not entered the charmed circle of art. He did not have any opportunity of coming in contact with any of the three distinguished visitors from Japan. Taikan's presence, gave the Indian artists, especially Gaganendranath an opportunity to study and adapt some of the aspects of calligraphy and Japanese use of colour in their own work. Nandalal vividly remembered Okakura's second visit which came about in September 1912[1] when he stopped in India on his way to Boston, U.S.A. This time too, he was the guest of Surendranath Tagore, and visited the Government School of Art as well as Jorasanko. He was by nature a man of few words, and not being very fluent in English language, what he said had an enigmatic flavour. "Art is no less an interpretation of nature, than nature a commentary on art." Art for him had the same life-sustaining quality as nature, and he

held both in equal respect.

Okakura in one of his visits to the Art School met Nandalal and his colleagues who were introduced by Abanindranath. At the very outset he asked their age, and then with a smile added, their age in art training. The young artists brought their work for his comments, and what he analysed was clear, pointed and critical without being abrasive. In one instance he referred to a colour scheme as dirty: what he desired to say was probably that the colours lacked transparancy and appeared heavy. In another picture he described a figure as reptilineal and not human. He went on to explain that a human being was a complete self, a contained unit, whose parts could not be isolated without harming its oneness; while a reptile was able to suffer a division, each part assuming organic independence. According to him "Art was a triangle with its three arms standing for tradition, observation and originality," and he further illustrated this by arranging three match sticks in a triangle and saying if one relied only on tradition the result would be vapid repetition of old conventions, and end in boredom. If the second arm of the triangle, observation, was emphasised, then again the outcome would end in limitation of things, and would not attain the verities of art. Finally if one indulged in indiscriminate originality, this would land one in the utter confusion of a mad house. Unless art was able to strike a balance, to hold these three in poise, it would fail to become aesthetically valid. Okakura was of the opinion that Indian art had always excelled in sculpture, its power lay in its ability to interpret tactile, three dimensional form. Sculpture was its forte. He urged that some Indian artists shoud take it up to arrive at worthwhile results. He could not at that point of time, see any Indian sculptor, working in the spirit of the neo-Bengal School. Even the volumetric forms of the Ajanta paintings were a reflection of this Indian sensibility.

Nandalal was impressed by Okakura who was a man of few words, not unlike Nandalal himself; whatever he said was pregnant with meaning and assumed relevance in different contexts of experience. In later years Nandalal's philosophy of art teaching bore the mark of these encounters with the Japanese savant.

1. Satyajit Choudhury, *Japaner Prerana: Nandalal Bose. Desh Vinodana, Nandalal number, 1389.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE POET AND THE PAINTER

Nandalal's work was gaining recognition, winning awards in exhibitions, and eliciting praise in the press. His painting *Sati* was reproduced in a reputed Japanese art journal *Kokka* and several others went to enrich the private collections of the Maharaja of Burdwan, Shri Puranchand Nahar and others. He was a regular visitor to the Jorasanko household and worked with Abanindranath and Ganganendranath as their artist disciple. His Ajanta assignment had come to an end, and occasionally he showed his work done at Ajanta to his mentors, more to learn from their comments than to win adulation.

One fine day he was sent for by the poet Rabindranath. Such a call from the senior Tagore was quite unexpected. Nandalal was conscious of his limitations and normally did not stray in pastures foreign to his comprehension. Like any young Bengali he had great admiration for Rabindranath. His respect for the poet was heightened by a feeling of awe. Nandalal met Rabindranath. The poet nearing fifty at that time greeted him with a smile. He said "I have seen your paintings, I like them, and now I would like you to illustrate some of my poems in *Chavanika*."

Nandalal tried to evade this request by saying he knew precious little about poetry, and his comprehension in these matters was so poor that he hesitated to accept such an assignment.

"Ah well perhaps you do not know how much you already know! Look, I will read a few of my verses to you." Then the poet recited some of his poems in a sonorous rich voice. As the words of the poet were weaving its magic, the painter began to see vividly the verbal content in pictorial images. At the end of this poetry reading Nandalal was thrilled to the core. Often he found his hair standing on end, so wondrous was the experience. He agreed to illustrate the poet's verses and executed some excellent pictures. But finally when the book appeared in print, it was found that the block makers and printers had bungled and the illustrations suffered in reproduction. Rabindranath ruefully commented:

> I had been waiting to see *Chayanika* in print more for its pictures. I am unable to see their original flavour of Nandalal's work. I am quite disappointed.[1]

By now (1909-10) Nandalal had become a member of the Jorasanko household for all practical purposes. He worked in the studio in the southern verandah sometimes on painting or on restoring old miniatures, or on cataloguing paintings in the family collection. He would often dine along with the other Tagores. Little surprise that Abanindranath commented "Nando is my right hand: I have emptied my tattered bag in his hands: and I have kept back nothing!" To him Nando was his disciple, son, and heir all rolled into one. Rabindranath often left Jorasanko to stay mostly in the *Brahmacharyasram* at Santiniketan. From time to time he came to Calcutta for some literary or social engagements or on his way to or from foreign countries. When he was in residence at Calcutta, Jorasanko would hum with activity and excitement. Often he would bring a group of his Santiniketan students to stage plays or arrange musical sessions. On one such occasion in the summer of 1914 Rabindranath had his play *Achalayatan* staged in Calcutta. It was widely acclaimed and Nandalal with some of his friends went over to Santiniketan for a weekend after the party had returned there. Asit Kumar Haldar was then engaged in giving lessons in art to the students of the Asram. Rabindranath decided to extend a ceremonial welcome

to Nandalal, with a small dignified function. Asit Kumar decorated the dias with flowers and *alpona*. Many scholars in residence such as Vidhusekhar Sastri, Kshitmohan Sen and others were present. Rabindranath welcomed the artist with a poem written specially for the occasion. After the usual garlanding, and placing 'tilak' on the forehead, the function ended with these words from the artist: "I feel, I am greatly blessed!" He could say no more. After the function Nandalal on his way back to his room had a strange sense not of mere elation or joy. It was much more. Later he described this experience saying:

> I thought I had lost all my grossness and corporality. It was like an opening through which light and breeze wafted freely. It was an experience of which I had no premonition. It came and went away leaving me a transformed person. I felt as though the blessings of the *Maharshi* had been bestowed on me through *Gurudev's* hands. Ecstasy filled my being.[1]

He was under the spell of Santiniketan and its spirit. Within two years of this unexpected and happy welcome in the Asram, Nandalal received another invitation from Rabindranath. This time it was to join him on a relaxed vacation at Silaidah. Nandalal accompanied by Mukul Dey joined the Poet's party at Sahjadpur, on the river Padma. His cousin Surendranath Kar was already at the camp. Rabindranath personally received the artists at the river ghat and conducted them to the *Kuthibari*. Rabindranath was a brisk walker and the two young artists followed him excited by the charming riverscape along the banks of the Padma. Nandalal's experience of the cranes flying over the vast expanse of the river has been celebrated in a painting he did later called "Winter evening on the river Padma".

Rabindranath was an accomplished host, and looked after their food and other needs with affection and care. Occasionally he would be apologetic saying that, had Rathi's mother been alive, she would have looked after them infinitely better. She was a great cook and diligent hostess! Nandalal came to know Rabindranath at close quarters and was amazed at his manysided personality. Rabindranath was an astute judge of people and often saw through the intentions of his employees who worked on the vast Tagore estates. He dispensed with the inefficient and talkative ones who exploited the labourers, and petty

farmers, and looked after the health problems of his men, their needs and education. Sometimes he helped in their family exigencies such as the celebration of marriages and festivals. The Poet proved himself a better manager than his other brothers. Dwijendranath and Surendranath were too soft and liberal and were unable to handle the problems of the estate with the necessary acumen. In all these affairs Rabindranath always appeared self-possessed, cool and composed. Nandalal never found the Poet resting or in bed. Even in the earliest hours of dawn, he would be seen sitting in contemplation, or working over literary compositions. He had indefatigable energy and would divide his time in a tidy work a day manner. In place of the popular image of a dreamy, absent-minded poet, one discovered a clear sighted, imaginative, sympathetic, shrewd but utterly human personality. For Nandalal it was a memory to be treasured.

The Poet had his lighter moods and regaled the company with humour, anecdotes and songs from the countryside which had touches of irony, banter or hilarity. Nandalal's sketch books were filled with figures of boatmen, women by the river side, sailing boats, ducks, fish and landscapes of the scenes around the camp. His drawing of the boatman Phokan Majhi is a characteristic one and shows the wiry figure of an old man sitting in his country craft. It is a fine study done with few deft defining lines. His younger colleague Mukul Dey had recently returned from an American and European study tour. Nandalal admired Mukul's manner of sketching from life, and tried to learn it. Nandalal was always a student and did not have condescending attitude to his junior. He found his masters everywhere, in colleagues, in his juniors, in people around him, in nature, and in his Guru Abanindranath.

1. Rabindranath Tagore's letter to C. Bandopadhyaya dt. 28.9.1909, published in *Pravasi*, 1348, p. 117.
2. Panchanan Mandal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal*, Bolpur, Rarh Gabesana Parsad, 1982, p. 382.

CHAPTER IX

NANDALAL AND COOMARASWAMY

Nandalal first met Coomaraswamy in the art school in 1907 where the latter had gone to see the works of the new art movement known as the Bengal School. Coomaraswamy was originally trained in the scientific discipline of geology and mineralogy. He was a Sri Lankan Tamil from his father's side. His mother Elizabeth Beeby was an English woman, daughter of a wealthy family from Kent, that had trade connections with India. Coomaraswamy after brilliant scientific research in geology turned to the study of art. He realised that the craft traditions of Sri Lanka were being invidiously swept away by the imported torrent of western industrial mass-produced objects of utility. He was particularly pained by the plight of the simple craftsmen whose work was no longer in demand.

Coomaraswamy after his scientific researches began to explore Indian and Sinhalese Art. His early years were given to extensive field work and study of art objects including paintings, miniatures, bronzes, sculputures, textiles, illuminated manuscripts. He also studied the ancient Sanskrit and Pali classics. His

knowledge of Sanskrit was deep, cosidering his early academic training was in English and in the Greek classics. He was mostly self-educated in the Sanskrit lore. His penchant for unravelling root meanings of words was sometimes very unorthodox. For example, the Sanskrit word *Rasasvadan* which was commonly understood as appreciation he translated as 'tasting of tincture'. This conveyed the etymological content but was nowhere near the word appreciation, which while it was popular conveyed the original sense only partially.

Coomaraswamy in those days had a Bohemian appearance. He wore his hair long and sported rings in his ears. He discarded European clothes, and took to using the dhoti, turban and *angavastram*. His lithe handsome figure, sharp acquiline nose and fair complexion gave him an appearance of distinction. He was Nandalal's senior by only five years, but had earned even in those early days a reputation for being a scholar and historian of Indian and Sinhalese art.

Coomaraswamy went round the art school with Abanindranath, and Sister Nivedita. His observation about the Neo-Bengal School was enthusiastic but also guarded. He considered the significance of the new movement was not in what they (the artists) had already achieved in the face of unsettling influences, but in the immense promise they held and in their efforts to rediscover the mainstreams of Indian art. His articles in various journals were discussed and analysed. His early writings *Borrowed Plumes* and *Handbook to the exhibition of Arts and Crafts* were already in print and had attracted wide attention in India. The time was ripe for his crusade on behalf of indigenous craftsmanship and art. The mood of enthusiasm was set by the political movements as that of the cry for Swadeshi and of stormy protest against the partition of Bengal. The Indian reaction to the British Imperial rule took various forms which included the boycott of British goods, and terrorist activities which it was hoped would hasten the end of alien rule. Macaulay's notorious statement that the aim of education in India should be designed to create a class of persons Indian in race but English in education and outlook was felt to be an insult.

Coomaraswamy after travelling widely in India returned to England. His first major contribution to scholarly studies was his

book *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*. This work was ready to be published in a press manned by the master craftsmen trained in the Morrisian [2] traditions of immaculate hand printing.

Nandalal's second meeting with him was in Jorasanko: This time (1910-11) he was a guest of Tagores. A sketch by Nandalal celebrates this meeting. The three Tagore brothers, Abanindranath, Ganganendranath and Samarendranath are seen reclining in their arm chairs and divans holding hubble-bubbles in a relaxed manner, reading or resting. Coomaraswamy is shown in conversation with Nandalal who is seen at his working desk, drawing a picture. The rapt expression on Nandalal's face, has a touch of humour, while Coomaraswamy's extended hand has flourish as if he is instructing or pointing to certain areas in the picture requiring modifications. Individual characterisation in this sketch is very convincing and one can recognise the likenesses of the different men.

During this period Nandalal was preparing a catalogue of the collection in the Jorasanko archives. Excellent examples of Mughal and Rajput miniatures, bronzes, *pats* and other art objects had been collected over the years chiefly by Abanindranath. Coomaraswamy was studying all these with painstaking thoroughness. He would make critical comments about their source of origin, chronology, workmanship and theme, and assist Nandalal in this work with scholarly insight. Nandalal has recounted his reminiscences of Coomaraswamy's visit. While admiring the work *Sati* by Nandalal he asked about its philosophical implications. Nandalal in his cryptic manner replied that, "I only knew the myth of Siva-Sati; at the Dakshayajna, Sati immolated herself. I know the mythological tale and I painted it. Whether there is any philosophy or not I do not know". On hearing this Coomaraswamy spoke about Indian womanhood:

> "No figure in the world's art could be more selfless, more wrapped in the unity of personal devotion, more terribly sweet and perfect than this young serene Bengali girl, whom scorching flames wake not from her dream of Him, who is her Lord in death and life. Not idly it is said that to Indian women, the husband-lover is her God. But this has a spiritual not domestic sense, in which it is often misinterpreted. To all

great lovers comes the knowledge that the one is Sakti and the other Mahadeva. Love then is more than personal.[3]

On another occasion Coomaraswamy brought out some original Rajput drawings on erotic themes, and asked Nandalal to copy some of them for his collection. Nandalal to start with felt embarassed. His orthodox background made him hesitate. But in the end he was encouraged to do the work. Coomaraswamy in his flamboyant manner explained that sex was a rich and rewarding human experience essential to life, and spiritual in the ultimate sense, *Brahmananda Sahodara*. The *Krishnalila* of Jayadeva or sculptures of Konarak or Khajuraho were as much expressions of art as of life. Here grossness stood transmuted into spirit.

In later years Nandalal stoutly defended these erotic classics when some misguided politicians were agitating for their removal.

1. Ananda K Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, London 1908.
2. William Morris
3. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *On Nandalal Bose, Pravasi*, Sept. 1909, p. 301.

CHAPTER X

INTERIM

Studies in the Art School were over, honours and awards came his way from year to year. He had started with a modest stipend from the art school budget. Later prizes and the sale of paintings to important collectors kept him at his working desk. In between he had been going on study tours, and to Ajanta for making facsimile copies of the murals. At the end of his course, when Percy Brown became Principal, Nandalal was offered a lecturer's post in the Art School itself. He however preferred to stay away from the official set up and chose to work in Abanindranath's studio in Jorasanko. He was content with an allowance which was poor in comparison to what he might have received at the Art School. By now he had a reputation and could have negotiated for higher emoluments. But he had the satisfaction of being with his Guru for whom he had great regard and affection. He instinctively realised that he had still more to learn before he reached the goals he had set himself. He was already familiar with the working of the art-school, which had elements of mechanical training and a time bound routine. This was foreign to his nature. Besides, he had been a witness to the tussle

between Abanindranath and Percy Brown. The former believed that art-studies could only be pursued in an atmosphere of freedom and experiment. Art had to be nurtured like a good garden. The gardner could only provide good seedlings, essential manure, water and weeding. Flowering took its own time, and could not be ordered. This view was counter to Percy Brown's ideas of good art education. Discipline, curriculum, time-table, punctuality and examinations were an essential part of the latter's concept of art school training. Their disagreements came to a head in later years when Abanindranath resigned his Vice-Principalship in 1915. His nephew Jaminiprakash Ganguly (the winner of an award in the Simla exhibition) took over the post. Jaminiprakash was more amenable to Brown's ways of thinking and in his own work he had shown proficiency in oil painting in the western academic manner.

Nandalal's association with the studio in Jorasanko was very informal. Some of the ladies from the Jorasanko household started taking lessons in art. In the early days his working hours and salary were not fixed. Absence of records would indicate a desultory patch in his career. He was cautiously looking around for a congenial haven. He was unconsciously coasting towards Rabindranath, whose books he continued to illustrate. The Poet too, was nursing a hope that in the near future Nandalal would join his select band of associates in his *Brahmacharyasram* at Santiniketan. This association materialised only after several tentative attempts on the part of Nandalal. The ceremonial welcome accorded in Santiniketan (referred to earlier) and his holiday at Silaidah as the guest of Rabindranath were some of the links that were to bind him later to Santiniketan, where he was destined to be for good: not only for his own good but for the good of Indian art as well. But this is anticipating future events. For the time being (1911-16) he was charging his creative batteries and exploring the art-world under the watchful eye of Abanindranath. His mere participation in art exhibitions elicitated praise. In the show organised by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1913, he exhibited his paintings on the Ramayana. These pictures were reminiscent of his acquaintance with the murals of Ajanta. The muted tones worked on with defining lines in these paintings were much admired. With all that, he was still without

any physical moorings. After the Silaidah break, Rabindranath offered a wing of the Jorasanko mansion for use as a studio and named it 'Vichitra'. The full official name of this centre of activity was "The Vichitra Studio for artists of the Neo-Bengal School.' The governing body of this association had an impressive array of office bearers. Besides Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, there were Sir John Woodroffe, Blunt, Muller as the Chairman and visitors respectively. Nandalal, Asitkumar and Mukul Dey were its founder members in charge of training the students joining the studio classes. Many of the students were ladies of the Tagore household, or friends of the Tagores. Santadevi was the daughter of Ramananda Chattopadhyya, Pratimadevi was the daughter-in-law of Rabindranath, Bratindranath, was also among the students who joined Vichitra. The art teachers received a fixed salary of sixty rupees a month and they lived on the Jorasando premises. Only Nandalal and Surendranath Kar commuted from their homes at Rajgunj Banipur.

In 1916 Nandalal's father, Purnachandra died. He was then working as the estate manager at the Darbhanga Raj. On hearing of his father's illness, Nandalal hurriedly left to be at his side. By the time he reached Darbhanga his father had already passed away.

When he came back to Calcutta, Abanindranath found him quite dejected. He advised Nandalal to go for a change to Puri. This interlude on the sea shores of Puri was a tonic to his drooping spirits. Arai Kampo who was sent by Rabindranath from Japan to work in Vichitra also joined Nandalal. Their Puri sojourn turned out to be a memorable workshop. Nandalal's new companion, Arai knew little of English and nothing of Bengali. However he communicated what he wished to say in a lively manner, with gestures, movements of the head and shoulders, and best of all through his laughter. Their comradeship was beneficial to both and became one of mutual enrichment. Arai was a master of Japanese calligraphy and it was a sight to see him wielding three brushes of varying sizes in one hand, and working with ease. Arai on his part was impressed by the rich colour in Nandalal's work. They travelled together to Puri, Konarak and several other places of interest in Orissa. But their chief joy was the wide sea shore in front of the house owned by the Tagores.

The vast expanse of the raging sea with high rolling waves breaking into foam was suitable for endless contemplation and sketching. The Oriya fishermen with their conical caps, lithe bare bodies full of vitality, working at their fishing nets was another inexhaustible subject. Nandalal utilised this holiday for absorbing lessons in brush-work. He practised the principles of calligraphy and several of his works in ink of this period show his mastery. Work with brush and Chinese ink involves a complex constellation of sensibilities — physical as well as psychological. The artist has to observe the form he is going to draw, and this observation is not one that is unique or limited to a particular time and place. His observation is total and universal so that he knows it as clearly as his own hand or his own signature. After innumerable studies of particulars he is able to arrive at the verities of that form. He then allows his mind a certain freedom, a freedom that is under the watchful eye of the observed truth. At the right moment, he wields his brush, he holds his breath and in a flash of awareness draws his subject with a few, deft, unalterable strokes, the result appears as if it were an act of destiny. The reason why the great calligraphers of Japan immersed themselves in Zen philosophy can well be understood. Their works of art belonged to super-rational state and spontaneous action. Hence the high regard in which such works were held in Japanese and Chinese art.

Nandalal's work from this point gradually turned to these new and rich quarries of expression. The vitality of line, its inexorable infallible movement, possessing the life breath or *chi* had a great fascination for him. His work slowly changed its centre of gravity from thematic content, from its illustrative expression of mythology and anecdote to the verities and dynamics of form itself. Henceforth form, colour and line were the primary concerns of his art. And in these three 'the line divine' played the dominant role.

Arai Kampo continued to work with Nandalal in Vichitra studio. It was Rabindranath's conviction that when the art of any country grew stale and repetitious, losing its powers and wealth of expression, the impact of an alien culture and art helped to awaken its native vitality. For this especially he fondly hoped that his two gifted nephews would travel to countries like Japan

which had a living heritage. Such visits he felt were not mere sight seeing tours, but worth a thousand lessons. But Gaganendranath or Abanindranath belonged too much to Calcutta and in particular to the life-style of Jorasanko to move out of it. Their reluctance was endemic. The Poet had therefore arranged to send Arai Kampo to them. He also purchased two paintings from Japan, one by Yokohama Taikan and the other a large screen by Shimamura. These were specially copied for the Poet.

Along with art studies, there was also the *Vichitra Sabha*, a sort of literary club which became extremely popular with the up and coming literateurs. This *Sabha* met regularly and Abanindranath often read out his stories, parodies, and skits to the group. At times he displayed his new paintings. Rabindranath whenever he was in Jorasanko would participate with a recently created song or recite an unpublished poem. The audience, often included Sukumar Ray, Charuchandra Bandopadhyaya, Sourin Mukhopadhyay, Satyen Dutta, Surendranath Tagore, Jagdishchandra Bose, Ramananda Chattopadhyaya and Sunitkumar Chatterjee. They would be entertained not only with a rich feast of music, art and poetry but also treated to lavish dinners in real Jorasanko tradition.

The *Vichitra* studio continued to function for about a year and a half, but the scarcity of funds made the effort end in a tame way. This interesting meeting ground for talented working artists ceased to exist for want of money. Launched with a bang, it ended with not even a whimper. Asitkumar and Mukul Dey left. Surendranath Kar joined Santiniketan where he was requisitioned by Rabindranath at the end of 1917. Asitkumar went over to the Government Art School as a teacher. Nandalal's son Biswarup went along with Surendranath to join the Santiniketan school. Only Nandalal remained undecided and unsure where to go. Thus ended the Vichitra phase of his life.

The closure of *Vichitra* left Nandalal at a loose end. He continued his work and association with Abanindranath, since there was nothing to call him away from Jorasanko. He also thought it wise to remain in contact with the studio there, where glimpses of the Poet were always refreshing. Soon the Indian Society of Oriental Art launched an ambitious plan of instituting art-classes and of art publications. This was made possible by a

substantial grant from the Governor of Bengal, Lord Ranaldshay. The classes started functioning in the large wing of a new building called *"Samavaya Mansions"*. Gaganendranath was its main organiser. Nandalal was appointed as chief-artist with a generous salary of two hundred rupees a month, which was quite considerable in those years (1918). Other artists who worked as colleagues were Kshitindranath Mazumdar and Giridhari Mahapatra. Asitkumar, had already left to join the Govenment Art School at the call of Percy Brown. During the years 1918-21, Nandalal went through a period of suspense and a feeling of instability. His three children were growing up. The eldest, Biswarup was in Santiniketan with Surendranath Kar. During the year 1918, his wife Sudhiradevi moved to Santiniketan and lived in a house known as *'Nutan Bari'* to look after the welfare and education of her children. Nandalal's salary at the Society was considerable but he was not happy. He found the atmosphere restricted by the administrative rules of the authorities. Nandalal believed in a certain amount of freedom; this he felt was necessary for any creative effort. He was averse to time-bound instruction where students were cloistered inside high walls. He attempted to establish a rapport as tactfully as possible. But Ganganbabu insisted on certain norms of attendance and regularity. On one occasion during a visit of the Bengal Governor to the Society, Gaganbabu ordered that the students and teachers should show their respect by standing, while their work required sitting at their desks. For Nandalal this was stretching the idea of decorum too far and he in his silent but stubborn way kept to his seat and went on working. Nandalal quietly left the Society in the summer of 1919 after receiving a disciplinary letter from Gaganbabu. In July of the same year, he joined Santiniketan and started taking classes regularly. Earlier he was visiting Santiniketan on week ends for teaching assignments. Nandalal's leaving the Society to come over to Santiniketan was not to Abanindranath's liking and he urged Nandalal to return to Calcutta. Poor Nandalal was in a dilemma. On the one hand he had developed a special regard for Rabindranath and an attachment to the Asram life. On the other, Abanindranath was more than a guru; he had a filial devotion towards him. There was an exchange of letters between Rabindranath and Abanindranath

on this matter. Rabindranath wrote:

I have been much disturbed by your letter to Nandalal. I had hoped much and have spent a lot in making arrangements for him. This hope is really not just for myself personally. It is more for the country and for you all. In that hope alone, I had spent unstintingly for Vichitra, even when my economic position was not equal to it. My sole desire was to give a stable and permanent shape to the seeds you had sown that were seeking to send forth shoots. I know that only through a nation's free will and effort, that any lasting, profound good could result. All literature, art, everything creative is born of freedom, and their greatness lies in it. If we are able to attain that greatness, through our own countrymen's effort, then alone would it be national in a true sense. Anyway I did not accept loss as loss. I do not even now. In Calcutta roots did not strike and therefore I had to spread my net-work here. Signs of its fruitfulness are also visible. The students are enthusiastic and so are the teachers, a sort of 'atmosphere' will emerge. Even Nandalal's own work is progressing well here. This would not be possible in Calcutta. Nandalal is completely free here. He is not burdened with any external responsibility. Besides, there are no distractions to interrupt his work. Another facility he is able to profit by is that of keeping in touch with Sanskrit and English literature. This gives him joy. Will it not enhance his creative powers? Your Society is mainly for exhibitions. From here such participation would be possible and would not come in his way. With all that, Nandalal has long holidays; when necessary he can always extend them. My point is that by his remaining here, your work too gets facilitated and this would give me joy.

If you disturb this arrangement I shall not consider my work wasted or count it my loss but certainly it will be a loss to Nandalal and you will not gain much out of it. If it was for the material loss that Nandalal should change and if he felt the need of taking advantage of a higher salary at the Society I would not say a thing. But (in absence of it)as his guru, please do not call him away. That will unsettle him especially when he is not after money. I have no power over Nandalal, but please be sure I have much hope, not only for the fruition of my

work here but for the sake of the country. I cannot compete with the government in matters of funds, but in all other respects, with general goodwill and joint effort we would be able to help him. Money can never accomplish that. Here we have abandoned our personal anxieties in the name of God we have dedicated ourselves to a cause. Is it not a greater inspiration than money? Is not that inspiration the greatest urge in all creative work?

Think well of what I have said dispassionately and with care. Even after doing so, if you still think otherwise, I will accept your decision with courage and continue to work alone. I have been alone all along in my work, I will keep on going my solitary way.

God bless you,

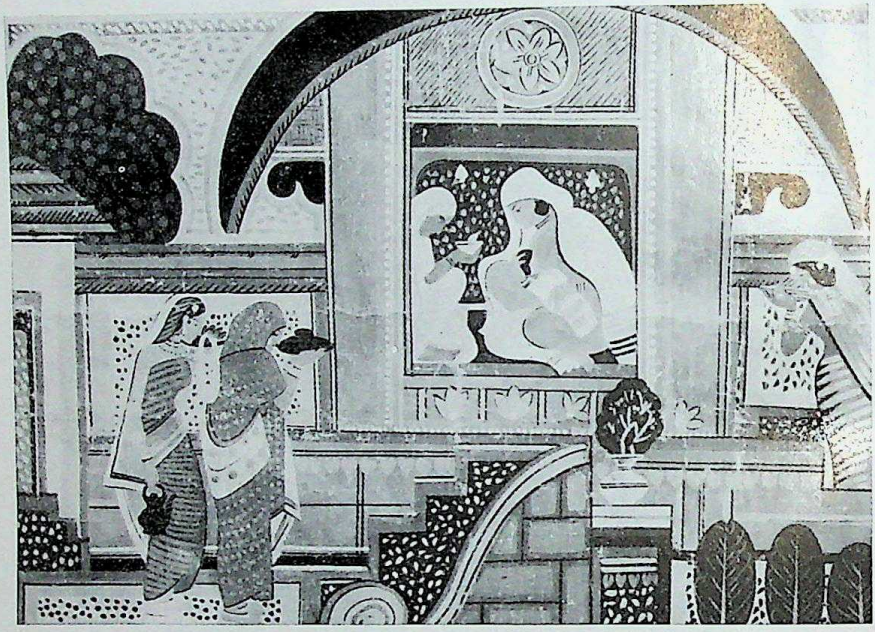
Yours Robikaka[1]

This letter bears no date, but appears to have been written sometime in November or December of 1919. Being uncertain about Nandalal's plans he asked Asitkumar to join Santiniketan offering him the same salary as Nandalal. In the middle of February 1920, the Governor of Bengal Lord Ronaldshay, visited Santiniketan. Rabindranath on that occasion introduced Nandalal as 'our artist Nandalal Basu'. To which Ronaldshay quipped, "Oh no! He is our Artist!"

After this incident Nandalal probably went back to Calcutta to work in the Society, but after some months of indecision returned to Santiniketan. The same year his name appears as a member of the staff in the *'Asram Sangbad'* of Aswin 1327 (October 1920). He along with Asitkumar and Surendranath Kar were reported to have participated in the decorations of an asram festival. During the latter part of 1920, there might have been some lack of rapport between him and Asitkumar. Nandalal anyway left Santiniketan for Kharagpur Haveli, and remained there for some months to avoid further misunderstanding.[2]

In March 1921 Nandalal joined the party of Asitkumar and Surendranath Kar on their way to the Bagh caves. Asitkumar had earlier been requested by the Archaeological Department of Gwalior State to submit a report on the condition of these mur-

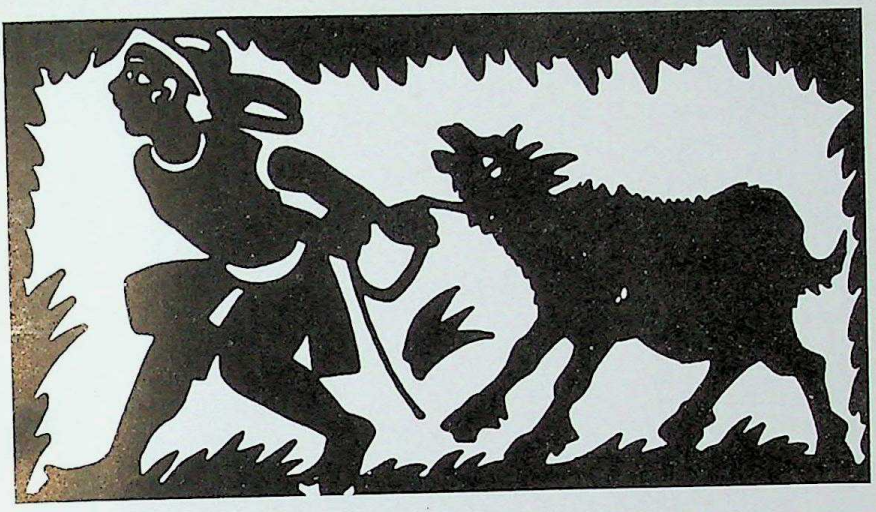
1. Saraswati. 1941. Tempera on paper.



2. Birth of Chaitanya. Tempera on paper.

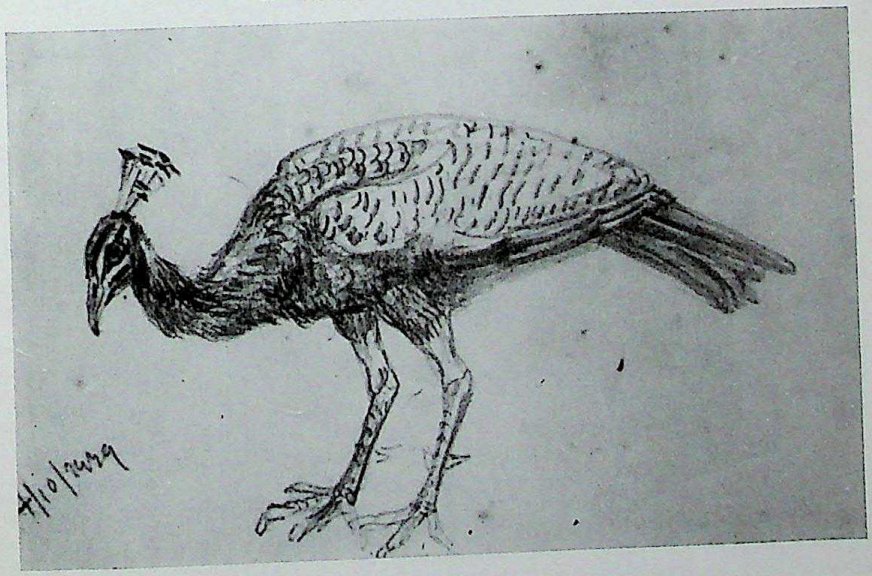
3. Bina Badini. Haripura Congress Panel. Tempera on paper.

BAPUJI



5. A boy with a Goat (Sahaji Path). Linocut

6. A Peacock. Pencil on Postcard.



7. A home at Tagda. Water colour on paper.

8. Sarangiwala. Haripura Poster.

9. Santhal harvest dance. Sketch.

10. Head of Siva. Wash Tempera

als. On the basis of this report Asitkumar was commissioned to have these murals copied. On this mission, Nandalal and Surendranath joined him. They had some rough but delightful experience of camp life. This work of copying the Bagh murals gave Nandalal further insight into the classical traditions of painting of our land. He made some excellent copies for the Gwalior State, and some duplicate one and tracings, which he managed to keep for Kala-Bhavana.

On his return from Bagh, he rejoined Kala-Bhavana and began to organise the department in right earnest. From the academic year of 1921-22, one does not come across the name of Asitkumar in *Asram Sangbad* of Santiniketan Patrika, and it is not clear whether he continued to work as a regular member of the staff. Asitkumar however left on a six months study tour to England with William Pearson and Nagendranath Ganguly, the Poet's son-in-law in 1923. On his return from Europe, Asitkumar received a letter from the Visva Bharati authorities, that he need not join.

With Nandalal in harness, a regular department of art studies began taking shape. The initial group of students that had gathered around him were Hirachand Dugar, Ordhendukumar Bandopadhyay and Ramendranath Chakravarti: (These had come along with Asitkumar in 1919). Also included were Binodebehari Mukhopadhyaya, Dhirendra Krishna Deb Barman, Satyendranath Bandopadhyay, Vinayak Masoji, Veerabhadra Rao Chitra, Srimati Hathisingh, Ramesh Basu, Sukumari Devi and Pratima Devei.[3]

The years of suspense passed with some psychological tensions and embarrassments, but finally with the rewarding association and help of Rabindranath, Vidhusekhar Sastri, Kshitimohan Sen, Jagadanada Roy and Kalimohan Ghosh, he found his place in Santiniketan: a niche he was destined to crown with glory.

1. Rabindranath Tagore in a letter to Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindra Bhavan Archives, Visvabharati, Santiniketan.
2. The statement is based on the author's interview with Biswarup Bose on 23.9.1983.
3. Asitkumar Haldar, *Robitirtha; and* Panchanan Mandal, *Bharat Silpi Nandalal*, (Vol. 1; Bolpur: Rahr Gabesana Parsad, December 1982).

CHAPTER XI

ETHICAL MOORINGS

Nandalal was naturally religious-minded and inherited an attitude of devotion and faith. Therefore it is not surprising that he was drawn into the wave of religious awakening initiated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. When Nandalal first went to Calcutta for his academic studies, he was moved by the spirit of the times. Like most of the young people of his age, he greatly admired Swami Vivekananda, the stormy petrel of Hindu philosophy and culture. The vigour and manly spirituality of Swamiji had fired the imagination of Indian youth all over the country. Later Nandalal came in touch with Swamiji's brother Mahendralal Dutta, familiarly known as Mahim babu. Nandalal and his colleague Sailendranath Dey often stopped to see Mahimbabu on their way back from the art school. These two young art students had won Mahimbabu's affection. When they visited him he would recount the stories of his overland journey by foot from England through several European and Asian countries, and tales of adventures which he had encountered. According to Nandalal he had a keen and discerning eye for art, and would on occasion advise the young art students about the ways of meditation that he felt were essential for

visualizing an image in art. He would point out that the painting of gods and goddesses was not a matter of surface illustration, it was born of contemplation and meditation. Nandalal spoke highly of Mahimbabu's scholarship and spiritual attainments. His book, *Dissertation on Painting* was prized by Nandalal for its perception and insight. Nandalal always referred to Mahimbabu as *'Punya-Darshan'*, that is, one whose very sight was a blessing. Nandalal always sought his guidance whenever there was crisis in his life, or when he felt in need of solace.

As a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Nandalal visited Dakshineshwar from time to time. He would recollect that he had seen two drawings done with charcoal on the walls where Sri Ramakrishna lived. These were done by Sri Ramakrishna himself. Nandalal considered them rather well drawn, they showed a considerable aptitude for art. The well-known story of Thakur (as Sri Ramakrishna was popularly known) spraining his ankle, while admiring a flight of white cranes against deep blue clouds, and experiencing ecstasy was of an aesthetic kind, and Nandalal was fond of referring to this incident. Throughout his life he was associated with the Ramakrishna Mission, and offered his services whenever they required his help. His admiration and respect for Sister Nivedita has been mentioned already. Whenever possible he taught in the Nivedita Girls' School, and his daughters had their early education in that institution.

Another member of the Mission who became his life-long friend and well-wisher was Ganen Brahmachari also known as Maharaj. Ganen was a very practical man and had varied interests ranging from photography and art to politics and social work. It has already been mentioned that he was specially deputed by Sister Nivedita to look after the needs and comforts of Nandalal's team when they were working with Lady Herringham at Ajanta. Even when Nandalal's house was under construction, it was Ganen Maharaj who came to his help, and freed him of his worries.

Another incident associated with Ganen Maharaj is still more telling and dramatic. At the time of Gauri's (Nandalal's elder daughter) wedding, Nandalal was flustered and worried. He could not imagine how be would make all the arrangements or whom he would invite. In colloquial Bengali, a girl's wedding

is synonymous with going bankrupt! Nandalal was sick with anxiety and wore a confused expression. Ganen Maharaj was amused at the situation and saw through his plight. Hastily he arranged to get a large sheet of cartridge paper almost two yards in length and a drawing pencil. He thrust these into Nandalal's hands and interned him in his room, bolting the door from outside. Before leaving, Maharaj warned "No way out now! I will be back only in the evening to release you, and to see your handiwork". The outcome of this shock treatment was a glorious full length line drawing of a youthful maiden welcoming her lover. The drawing fetched five hundred rupees which was sufficient to account for immediate needs.

Another major influence on Nandalal was that of Mahatma Gandhi. Here was a man, simple as a peasant, truthful as a saint, logical as a lawyer and yet so human and full of compassion. "This little man of poor physique had something of steel in him, something rock like. There was royalty and kingliness in him which compelled a willing obeisance from others."[1] Nandalal's first encounter with the tiny man of lofty soul, was in Santiniketan during latter's visit to the Asram in September 1920 (26th Bhadra 1327).

Nandalal called on Mahatmaji in the thatched hut near Konark-Uttarayana, when he was having his evening meal. Kasturba was by his side attending on him. Nandalal and his group of students paid their respects by touching the feet of Mahatmaji and Ba, and sat on the floorspread nearby. After initial exchange of courtesies, Nandalal asked: "we hear that you do not see any significance or major role for art in today's India. What does this imply?" Gandhiji turned his head in the direction of the western window where the evening glow had coloured the horizon in a riot of colour. He slowly looked back at Nandalal and mused: "The glory of sun-rise and sun-set is a diurnal miracle. The artist tries to imprison it, but has to rest content with its faint shadow. If I can see this ineffable beauty sitting here, is there any need to paint a picture of the sun-set and hang it on the wall inside this room."[2]

Nandalal did not express his own opinion and after talking about other matters, left. In after years Nandalal would have countered the argument by replying that there was no external

need for such a sunset to be painted, the need if any, was an inner one. The desire of the artist to express himself was born of a fulness or surfeit. In fact it was not because of any need. In place of need, there was the feeling of abundance or even excess. *Bhuma* superfluity went beyond the requirements of mere utility. The act of creation was in joy that sought to flower and it was in joy that art had its roots.

Nandalal's preference for indigenous colours, paper and other art materials owed much to Mahatmaji's love for Swadeshi and Khadi. During the Non-cooperation movement in the early twenties, Calcutta was all agog with patriotic fervour. Young and old left their regular work, their schools and even their jobs. Meetings, processions and poster campaigns were in full swing. Nandalal was working on posters at the Congress office. Here young Mohanlal, a grandson of Abanindranath, was busy with preparations for putting up the posters on the streets. In the middle of this activity, the agitated voice of Abanindranath was heard. Nandalal promptly sought shelter behind a pillar, hiding out of sight. Poor Mohanlal, then just an adolescent boy could think of nothing else, and he surrendered tamely. Abanindranath entered the room, collared the boy and whisked away saying:

> 'It is a silly dragnet to catch school going urchins, set by these new fangled Congressities. I will have none of this nonsense![3]

Nandalal did not dare to question the wisdom of this remark. All the same, he remained faithful to the call given by Mahatmaji.

On his return from his South American tour, Rabindranath noticed Pandit Vidhusekhar Sastri and Nandalal sitting at their spinning wheels. Rabindranath's views on the *Charka* and its contribution if any, to the national movement were not unknown to Nandalal. But both of them continued their spinning chores. Rabindranath had a large vision. He noticed, but made no comments. He did not believe in imposing his views on his colleagues and associates. The freedom which he desired for himself he also granted others, appreciated the stand of those who differed from him.

While recounting the meetings of Nandalal and Ananda Coomaraswamy, it was noted that Nandalal was by nature, shy if

not a little prudish in matters of sex. When asked by Coomaraswamy to copy erotic drawings from Rajput originals in his collection, he had demurred. But after a little persuasion he agreed to do them. As he grew and matured, and knew more of art, he realised the significance of the sculptures at Konarak, Bhubaneswar and Khajuraho. When proposals for holding the Congress Session in Puri were under consideration, some puritan leaders had reservations about the erotic sculptures on the temple facades. They felt such works were a vulgar exhibition of sensuality and offered funds to cover these up with plaster. They had almost convinced Mahatmaji to agree. There was lot of controversy on this matter. When asked, Nandlal's reply was forthright: "This (covering of the sculpture) would be a a sacrilegious act. In life, sex is merely a step in the ladder towards ultimate release, *Moksa;* others being *Dharma* and *Artha*. The birth of a child can never be obscene. An act which leads to birth is amoral and has its sanction in religion. Everybody knows the biological aspect of child bearing. But this knowledge is sheltered out of sight. In art this need not be so. Sex gets purified in the creative fire of art; it attains sanctity worthy of a temple. Like a new born child it is a miracle of new creation, outside the pale of everything that is dross. It attains immortality in the realm of art. This realm excludes neither the sordid nor the noble. All that is or exists can be its theme ." For Mahatmaji, Nandalal was the last word in matters of art. The matter was closed and no damage done to the sculptures of Orissa.

Mahatmaji considered cleanliness was not only next to godliness, it actually partook of godliness by proximity. When he first came to Santiniketan in March 1915, with a batch of inmates from Tolstoy Farm, South Africa, he undertook to clean the surroundings, to scavenge the drains and toilets and tidy up the litter. Every year, the tenth of March, thereaftter was observed as *Gandhi Punyah* when students and staff would arm themselves with brooms and baskets, in an operation clean-up. When Nandalal came to Santiniketan he was enthused by this spirit of service. He would lead teams of students and organise volunteer corps for scavenging. He took a batch of students to the *Jaideva Kenduli* fair and spent days in cleaning the place. The group removed the refuse that piled up around the eating stalls which

were littered with leaves, scraps of paper and clay containers. The team did all this cheerfully.

Nandalal's respect for Mahatmaji grew with the years and with closer association. In the years to come, Mahatmaji reciprocated by always consulting Nandalal on matters of art and decoration. Mahatmaji recognised that in Nandalal the spirit of Swadeshi was metamorphosed into creativity.

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Soul of India*, p. 314.
2. Dhirendra Krishna Deb Burman, *Bharatiya Silpasiksay Kalabhavan* Desh Vinodan, no. 1386, Cal., p. 42.
   There are doubts Nandalal having met Mahatmaji at this date. Nandalal himself has recorded having met Mahatmaji for the first time at the Lucknow Congress in early 1935.
3. Mohanlal Gangopadhyaya, *Dakshiner Verandah*, (Calcutta, Visvabharati Publication Dept;), p. 70.

CHAPTER XII

FAR EASTERN VOYAGE

Nandalal's first acquaintance with Japan was through the prestigious art journal *Kokka* in which his early masterpiece *Sati at the pyre* was reproduced by a novel process of chromograph in which in place of litho stones wood-cut blocks were used. His work had earned encomiums in art circles. The visits of the Japanese masters Taikan and Hisida around 1903, could not have come to his notice at the time, as he was then outside the sphere of influence of Abanindranath, struggling to cross the thorny barriers of academic examinations. Later however he had the opportunity of meeting Count Okakura in 1912 and could then get a glimpse of the Japanese sensibility through the latter's comments on art, aesthetics and life. Still later Arai Kampo became an associate in the Vichitra Studio, they were also together during their Puri stay. Arai's companionship led to a renewed interest in Far Eastern art. When Rabindranath invited Nandalal to join him on a tour of China and Japan, Nandalal agreed with alacrity. Rabindranath's party included Pandit Kshitimohan Sen, Nandalal, Kalidas Nag, Leonard Elmirst and Miss Green. With a warm send off at the *Asram*, they left Calcutta on 21st April, 1924. From then on, the

observant artist kept sketching and writing notes on everything he saw; anything rich in form or colour, exotic in mood or in human appeal was taken down in a sort of visual shorthand. On the eve of their departure, Rathindranath, son of the Poet, gave him a camera. With no training or prior experience in handling it he undertook to photograph, whenever he had no time for sketches. On the 25th of April they entered Rangoon. The shoreline with the rising Pagodas of the ancient city was an unusual sight for Nandalal, he made several drawings for mailing to friends in the *Asram* and to the members of his family. In the city of Rangoon Rabindranath's party was entertained with lavish hospitality. A special dance performance was arranged in their honour. Here Nandalal was impressed by the mobile rhythm of Burmese dance. In his letter to Gauri (his daughter who had taken part in the dance-dramas of Rabindranath) he compared the danseuse to the delicate hues of a *Shephali* flower so tender and subdued in colour, so fresh and evanescent. He made sketches of the hairstyles of the dancers, of their costumes, and of the moving form in the act of dancing. The drummers and musicians with their exotic instruments were also recorded. By doing this he was imbibing the spirit of the place, and he also desired to convey this experience to his students and colleagues, who were probably eagerly awaiting his letters. In his walks, on the streets of Rangoon he would come across simple things of interest like a shed for water meant for any passerby to quench his thirst. A water-pot and glass stood arranged neatly in a corner. These utilitarian objects were relieved with a few flowers for colour and formed a sort of a visual oassis. At the farthest end of the city where it bordered the countryside, he observed a tiny hut almost like a bird's nest with just room for storage. All such little details did not escape his eye and he recorded them with refreshing immediacy. The voyage on the steamer was usually eventless and boring, and then Nandalal would invent some innocent practical jokes to cheer them up. When they had boarded their steamer for the next lap of their voyage, the Poet's fans loaded his cabin with flowers, fruits and presents. As the ship lifted anchor and sailed out of port for the open sea, Nandalal sneaked out of his berth and lifted some juicy mangosteens from the Poet's room. He was making his second trip from the

Poet's cabin to his own with an armful of these lush fruits when Rabindranath caught him red-handed. Nandalal smiled with feigned alarm. The Poet also joined in the joke saying "You don't have to explain! I have seen, what was meant not to be seen!"

An interesting sketch by Nandalal shows the ship's cabin which he and his two companions shared. Here one can see his disarming ability to laugh and poke fun at himself.

Nandalal described the conditions in China as he witnessed them, in a letter to Rabindranath.

"Here it appears as though a vast section of humanity has been awoken in the middle of their slumber and men have started working in a torpor. The Chinese are truly great in art, more so in their exquisite craftsmanship. But one feels sorry to see a state of general decadence in matters of taste. A masterly calligraphy may find itself incongruously placed by the side of a garish westernised calender. In their dress, they seem to have abandoned their native costumes and one often comes across women in Sino-European clothes, wearing high heels and short hair like 'tommies'. I had the opportunity of seeing some extraordinary royal seals, rare and beautifully carved. The vast complex raised for the Royal University is stupendous and gives one a shock, so immense and overpowering is it in its magnitude. The Emperor appears to be a noble man. If he could wield the reins of power, probably things would have been better. But he is under the influence of a European tutor, who rules the roost. One good thing that they have done is to ban the export of ancient paintings and historical art-objects. Even when the Government learns of the sales of art-objects to tourists, they collect these back for their own museums. Thus museums are cropping up all over the country.

One can, if one searches for them, still come across knowledgeable persons, who are connoisseurs and value the superior quality of classical examples of art. But the number of such people is small. The majority are unimportant sentimental poets, or artists who appear eager to race before they can walk on their own feet. Led by opinion they disparage anything that has the flavour of maturity, age or tradition."[1]

The letter gives us some insight into Nandalal's way of thinking at the time. He collected many scrolls, rubbings, seals and

books for the Kala-Bhavana collection. As return gifts he wrote to Surendranath Kar to mail him some drawings of frescoes, books on alpona, and a few prints of Abanindranath's works. Nandalal visited Lung-mien and other historically important sites and saw how Buddhist art had permeated throughout the East. Leonard Elmirst who was one of the members of Rabindranath's party has stated that:

"Nandalal was able to show to us and to the Chinese artists, which of the earlier representations of the Buddha had been drawn from direct contact with Indians and sometimes by the Indian Buddist missionaries themselves. The Mongol invasions around 1200 A.D. put a sudden end to this international collaboration. The Sung Dynasty that had till then managed to combine in one pattern of culture Taoist mysticism, Buddhist respect for the individual and Confucian ethics. In a cave near Hang-chow Nandalal pointed out to a group of Chinese Buddhist monks and to us, the Indian character in face and dress of the very early stone figures carved on the wall was quite apparent. The Buddhist monks then pointed to Kshitimohan Sen, and remarked that he might well have been actual model for the figure himself." Elmirst ended by saying that it was an education to be with Nandalal.[2]

Nandalal was amazed to see the affinity of Chinese murals to those of Ajanta. He only found a difference in the treatment of folds in their costumes and a lack of emphasis on form in some of these murals. He almost became a confirmed admirer of Chinese character and often debunked the idea of their being addicted to opium. He would remark: "Yes, they are addicts, not to opium, but to work. I have not come across another race, so hard-working and skillful as the Chinese." While passing through in the interior of the country towns, he often paused to watch children engaged in play. Looking at them, feelings of affection would rise in his mind.

At the end of their Chinese tour, Nandalal was not at all sure whether they would be able to get to Japan. Invitations, itinerary and hospitality were under correspondence. Ultimately they managed to disembark at Tokyo. Nandalal was delighted to renew his friendship with Arai Kampo his companion of *Vichitra* days. Arai San true to Japanese tradition was an affection-

ate host to Nandalal. In Tokyo he met for the first time the celebrated painters Yokohama Taikan, Shimomura Kanzan, and their Society of artists. He was accorded a warm reception by this Society called Bijutsu-in. Their works were displayed. He was taken around to various galleries to see contemporary Japanese art.

Here for the first time he saw the traditional reverence of artists to their place of work, to their instruments and materials, and to their profession. When a Japanese artist was at work, he would first see that his studio was spotlessly clean. It was uncrowded and without clutter or chaos. The surroundings would seem almost sacred. The use of brush, ink or colour would have a ceremonial dignity. The Japanese artist relied on simplicity, and avoided show, signs of violence or trauma. A display of anger was considered as lack of culture. During work all movements would be under the magnetic spell of a controlled inspiration. Nandalal greatly admired the beauty and elegance of this attitude.

He also witnessed the meeting of two great Eastern poets, Yone Noguchi and Rabindranath. This confluence of the two poets reverberated for a long time in the literary circles of Japan. On the eve of their departure Arai Kampoo made a line drawing of Nandalal's profile. Nandalal responded by sketching Arai. On the back of the sketch, Arai wrote 'My intimate friend Nandalal Bose drew my face.'

Nandalal returned to Santiniketan early in July 1924, loaded with Chinese and Japanese art works, books, sketches, travel notes and more importantly, with memories of newly won friends in foreign lands.

1. Nandalal's letter to Rathindranath Tagore, dt. 8.5.1924 Rabindra Bhavan Archives, Visvabharat, Santiniketan.
2. Leonard Elmirst, *Nandalal Bose,* Visvabharati Quarterly, Nandalal no. Vol. 34, (1,2,3,4)

CHAPTER XIII

WALL PAINTINGS

Back in Santiniketan he started organising the activities of Kala-Bhavana. Education while working on a site and apprenticeship in painting were taken up in right earnest. For this he organised groups to paint murals on the modest buildings that were built with the generosity of the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar and the Rana Saheb of Porbunder. Thus we find that the states of Gujarat and Saurashtra were foremost in their respect for Rabindranath and in offering economic aid.

Rabindranath during his first vist to Japan, had written to Abanindranath about his views on contemporary Indian art. He felt that what it required was to outgrow its miniature phase. He believed that a larger format and an ability to handle form in broad strokes as seen in Japanese screens, Makimono and Kakimono paintings would lend much needed vitality to our art. The expansive murals of Ajanta had these qualities. He had therefore arranged for Arai Kampo to make two large copies of paintings by Taikan and Shimomura Kanzan. These two works are now valuable treasures in the Kala-Bhavana collection. Nandalal felt a similar need to work on large pictorial areas, where the artists hand, would not remain cramped with delicate and

minute handling. He had seen how the masters of Ajanta and Bagh wielded their brush, to express volumetric conceptions and the plenitude of human or animal forms. He was therefore in a proper frame of mind to start on wall painting when the art classes moved from *Santoshalaya* to the first floor of the former library verandah. Here he began his first experiments in murals, an interest which was to last him all his life. He decided to confront walls as a painting space and see what could be achieved. In the Government Art School in Calcutta was the small mural panel, *Kacha Devayani* done by Abanindranath. That mural was actually an enlargement of a small picture, it did not possess the feel that a mural should have. The two figures in the panel appeared decorative and colourful, they did not grow out of the wall or belong to it. By contrast, Ajanta was, a surface of walls awakening into a multitude of forms: figures, flora and fauna. The walls of the caves appeared to have coalesced with the painted theme and designs and even with the architecture. Nandalal, sensitive as he was, accepted these challenges of mural expression. His initial and tentative experiments were his decorations designed for Basu Vigyan Mandir in 1917.

From 1924 onwards Nandalal cooperated with Rabindranath, Jagadananda Roy, Vidhusekhar Sastri and Kshitimohan Sen, in creating an atmosphere in Santiniketan which would in itself be an education. Rabindranath arranged to celebrate nature through songs written and composed in praise of the various seasons. Festivals of spring, rain or autumn, and fairs or *melas* held at *Satui Paush* and *Magh*, became occasions for communal cultural expression. Elaborate and tasteful decorations were devised to form an environment for dances and songs set to Rabindra-Sangit. Renowned musicians like Veena Sangameshwara Sastri of Pithapuram came to the Asram as distinguished artists in residence. The students of Kala-Bhavana were drafted wherever Nandalal desired them to work. Whether it was drawing or alpona, murals or fire-fighting, spring cleaning or nursing the sick, Nandalal would find some assignment to enthuse his band of disciples. The hostel life, too, knit the students in comradeship by the mere fact of sharing and living together.

The combination of poetry and art was to reach a high watermark, when Rabindranath decided to write texts for children in

Bengali. These primers called *Sahaj-Path* (Easy Lessons) were illustrated with attractive linocuts and drawings by Nandalal. Rabindranath acknowledged Nandalal's role in the success of the *Sahaj-Path* volumes by earmarking the proceeds of the publication for the development of Kala-Bhavana.

CHAPTER XIV

ARCHITECTURE & MUSEUM

Nandalal had a natural flair for design and this talent is seen in some of his plans for architecture. His associate and cousin Surendranath Kar had in his later years given up painting and taken to architectural design, planning several Santiniketan buildings. But Nandalal's interest was occasional and he planned structures only when he was involved with their use.

His own house in Santiniketan has some original features. In it his studio at the north eastern corner was fully glazed and the light could be monitored with screens. A corridor led to the main living space at the rear. This was a large covered area open on three sides and multipurpose, for it could be used for receiving guests, as a resting, meeting or working place. This verandah was squarish and had a broad low ledge all round which provided additional sitting space. The structure was open to the landscape of which it seemed an integral part. It was functional and its proportions dignified and subtle.

The orginal building constructed for Kala-Bhavana called *Nandan* was meant to contain a museum; an exhibition gallery

and studios. The money for it came mainly from the proceeds of *Sahaj Path* that were earmarked for the development of Kala Bhavana. The ground plan of Nandan was reminiscent of South Indian temple architecture with a series of verandahs leading to horizontally placed halls. The building had a Southern orientation. A small square, covered entrance led to the first interior enclosure placed at right angles to it. This housed the library and also had low built-in chests for the precious scrolls of Far Eastern paintings and rare textiles. Beyond it a large lobby led to the main exhibition hall. On both sides of the lobby were two large rooms which served as studio areas. The ground plan was a combination of rectangles and squares in a symmetrical and balanced placement. The windows of the building were large and low with no bars. The main exhibition hall named after Havell had an all over display space. Ventilation was arranged by the unusual method of two tunnelled vents at the northern corners. Natural light was brought in from the top with glass. It was a satisfying solution for the needs of the art department. The elevation of the building had a dignified low rectangular facade with small architecuural accents at the points where the walls joined. The building depended on its proportions and for the relationship of the parts for its merit.

Nandan museum came to have an extraordinary collection that grew over the years. The nucleus had originated with the various paintings and scrolls received as gifts by Rabindranath on his travels to China, Japan, Java, Sri Lanka and other countries. Some paintings were ordered by the poet like the copies of paintings by Taikan and Shimomura Kanzan. When Nandalal joined Kala Bhavana he already had some experience of museology for he had worked on cataloguing the art treasures of Abanindranath with Ananda Coomaraswamy as a guide. As a student he had had the benefit of studying the collection at the Indian Museum which was at that time in the same building as the Art School. He was aware that a museum with original material was essential for art education. So he constantly made efforts to collect objects that were aesthetically important. The terracottas of Birbhum and Bankura, textiles of Assam and Manipur embroideries of Kathiawar and Bengal, bronzes of Bastar, etc were all preserved. Besides humble folk vessels, toys, and bas-

ketry, there were masks, tribal ornaments and metalware, all these were chosen for their formal beauty. Indian painting was represented by works of the Rajput, Mughal and Jain schools, folk art by Kalighat paintings, scrolls from Midnapur and other places. Nandalal with the eye of a connoisseur collected art objects whenever funds permitted. The museum was further enriched by the paintings of Abanindranath, Gaganendranath and Rabindranath. The copies of Bagh frescoes, tracings from Ajanta and other places were among the exhibits meant for study. Nandalal himself worked on a catalogue of these art objects which numbered over four thousand. He personally wrote the entries of acquisition — giving dimensions, descriptions, source of origin etc. And for identification his remarks were often accompanied by small sketches. All this was a labour of love, not only had art to be preserved, it had to be appreciated by the students whose judgement and sensibilities would be enhanced by a careful observation of originals.

Coming back to the subject of murals, in 1926-27, Nandalal arranged for the services of a Jaipur Mistri, Narsing Lal. He was a skilled craftsman in the techniques of Jaipur frescoe. Murals painted in this manner involved a painstaking process, where each colour had to be applied with extreme care in stipples, and then beaten into the wall surface by patting with a trowel. This had to be finished while the surface remained damp and had the required consistency. Only stone and earth colours were employed, thus the palette was rather restricted. The design of the mural also had to accept the limitations of the medium which did not permit afterthought, correction or super imposition. The defining line if any had to be placed with utmost certainty and control. So the method was one that was a challenge to any master painter. The paintings first attempted in this technique were executed on the first floor of the old library verandah. Here, the students and staff worked jointly, and the decorations were therefore divided into several panels. Each panel was separate, and there was not much unity of theme or design. Most of these murals were adaptations from different sources such as Ajanta, Egyptian murals, Persian miniatures, or Chinese motifs. Only two panels, one on the eastern and the other on the western walls were original compostions. The one painted by

Nandalal (on the western wall) depicted early morning *Vaitalik* in Santiniketan where Rabindranath is shown amidst a group of singing boys and girls. Mellow patches of colour against a deep sky lent the scene solemnity. The eastern wall also had a composition, which illustrated the morning *upasana* held under the *Sal* trees. All these panels were really exercise in mural decoration without any pretence to originality. These exercises provided much needed practice and experience in the techniques of mural painting and in orienting the artists towards largeness of design. Miniatures were primarily objects of art for private delectation and reverie while murals were a kind of social art, examples in group culture, and thus eminently in tune with the poet's ideas of education through climate and atmosphere.

After this initial trial of adapting design to a wall, Nandalal ventured on a large design forty seven feet long and three feet five inches in height specially done for the newly created *Halakarsana* ceremony that was first held in Sriniketan in 1928. The design is divided into several panels. Gurudev is seen lending a hand at ploughing the first furrow, with a plough drawn by three pairs of sturdy bulls. In front of these, a priest with offerings of a coconut and flowers held in his hands is sitting on an *asana*. The priest resembles Pandit Vidhusekhar Sastri who usually conducted the ceremony and chanted Vedic mantras on such occasions. Santhal girls are seen following Gurudev blowing the conch and carrying fruit and flowers on trays along with the other accessories of worship. This work in its original state was a *tour de force*, executed with masterly broad strokes, deft, precise and dynamic in their ability to define and animate form. It was done in the Italian wet process called *Frescoe-buono*. The process called for unusual command over drawing. The groundplaster consisted of lime and sand which had to be maintained damp enough for work; not too damp nor too dry. At the critical span of time, which was usually two to three hours after the plaster was laid, the painter had to draw his design with speed and accuracy. The drying plaster would not admit second thoughts. Once drawn, it became part of the wall, since it was the plaster that absorbed the colours. The paint did not remain a layer on the surface, it penetrated the body of the wall. This frescoe without any reservations, was a landmark in twentieth century murals in

India. Unfortunately it was repaired at a later date by those who had neither the vitality nor feeling for murals which Nandalal had. Even Nandalal himself would not have thought of touching it, once the plaster was dry. Such works are born spontaneously. The retouching has damaged it beyond repair.

In 1934, Nandalal planned another mural and again Narsing Lal the mistri from Jaipur arrived. This time all the work was handled by Nandalal himself. Narsing Lal prepared the ground plaster and students helped in grinding colours, tracing the drawings, and in general assisting by keeping the required materials ready. This mural is not knit around a single theme, and each panel has a separate subject with varying visual interest. Above the main composition horizontal panels have the *Khowai* landscape as their theme, red earth erosions with cattle grazing, bulls fighting and Santhal shepherds with their flutes are depicted. The handling is summary and lively. The first lower panel shows a *Nati* in a pose, bending in obeisance. It is in broadly laid out colour, precise in lines and with a few encrusted ornaments. The second one, is based on the drama *Shapmochan.* It consists of figures in elegant movement, a group of musicians and a few spaced accents of rhythm placed as a counter point to the trees. The panel appears like a mellow quilt of complementary colours. The central panel broader than the rest, depicts *The birth of Chaitanya.* Mother and child dominate the painted area, with a major note of white symbolising purity. On the left are seen two women with trays laden with offerings. The linear accents are sparse. Varying textures are created with dots and lines where necessary.

But the liveliest passage of this mural is on the right and is a long horizontal panel showing a day in the life of the *Asram.* It is a delightful visual document of those years. There are Chinese scholars, a Santhal gathering leaves, a village dog — the inescapable companion of children, — as well as crows, donkeys and a monkey. In the middle of the scene we recognise Narsing Lal mistry busy applying plaster, close by Nandalal himself is seen dipping his brush in a bowl of colour held by a girl assistant. Scholars by the window, students wandering in a landscape, punctuated with trees fill the scene. It is an exquisite pictorial record. At the end, a figure engaged in decorating the wall is

shown. The whole mural in a way revolves around life in and around Santiniketan. The *Khowai*, the dramatic performance of Shapmochan, *Asram* life, a Santhal woman decorating the wall of her hut, herds of cattle and the bulls fighting are all orchestrated into a living panorama. *The birth of Chaitanya* alone stands out as an independent subject, but when one comes to think of it, the eternal theme of birth forms part of every situation. The paean in praise of the miracle that is birth is justly a centre piece to this symphony.

Nandalal's decorations done for the All India Congress sessions held at Lucknow, Faizpur and Haripura were really in the spirit of murals but these will be discussed in a later chapter.

Nandalal's encouragement to his colleagues and students to try their hadn at murals yielded a rich harvest. The mural on the ceiling of the students' dormitary by Binodebehari depicting the placid rural life of Birbhum, is an excellent example. This work is like a rich tapestry of flora, fauna and the people of the land, woven with superb ease, wit and sensitbility.

In 1939 Nandalal was commissioned by the Maharaja of Baroda to decorate a building known as Kirti Mandir. The building was on an inconspicuous hybrid kind, cluttered with arches, ornate pillars, jalis, and lacked a sense of space. There was hardly an uniterupted wall space available. Nandalal worked on this assignment on four different priods between 1939 and 1946. Due to the Santiniketan milieu and with limitations imposed by architecture and of time, he played safe in matters of technique and design. He did not venture on experiments and preferred to work in the well-tried medium of egg-tempera. In his design also, he simplified the process by getting colour areas laid out in flat patches. The figures and forms he finished with steady, controlled, even line drawing. His unwillingness to take risks in a cluttered building becomes clearer, when one compares his *Natir Puja* a mural done in Santiniketan which he repeated at Baroda a year later. The Cheena-Bhavana mural is executed with splendid verve with only a piece of rag dipped in colour which served as a brush. Th figures are drawn with generous sweeps of the hand. The brown tones of the drawing merges with the light warm tone of the ground. The unfolding of the theme is no unlike a Japanese screen painting spreading over several panels, with

its composition spilling from one part of the screen to the next. The opening passage has *Nati* the heroine seen with a tray full of ritual flower offerings. Following this, a girl with a musical instrument and her companion are shown. Then the scene of an interior opens with a group of musicians and *Nati* bowing before a Buddhist monk. This is followed by an outdoor view showing a group of women on their way to shrine. Next comes the court-scene with a queenly figure and dancing *Nati* The mural ends with a dramaatic note, in which the *Nati* is seen lying prone on the ground. Behind her, nature alone stands witness to her consecration and sacrifice. Three towering Sal trees and the large orb of the moon on the horison ring the finale. It is a moving spectacle restrained in colour and emotion. On occasion the brown tone of the figures is heiightened with a few enlivening touches of terraverte. Only, the lines added later drawn rather mechanically with a scale sometimes fail to harmonise with the general handling which is free and spontaneous. When one compares this with his later versionn of Natir Puja in Baroda one becomes conscious of the constraints he laboured under there. Obviously he preferred to tread a known path for a desired effect.

His first mural in Kirti Mandir that of Gangavataran done in 1939 has the appearance of a large Tibetan tanka with stylised decorative emmbellishments around the central figure of *Trikaleswara.* The figure seems to look into the void communicating a sense of impermanace. The message of transcience awaiting all sentiment beings is communicated in telling manner. Its severity of design suggests to the spectator the eternal truth of death which transcends life.

The second panel which depicts the life of Meera done in 1940 is in a scheme of colours in a low key. The overall mood is one of devotion and purity. It is enlivened by a passage of mystic gathered at a traditional religious congregation.

The third panel, Natir puja, has been discussed earlier. The lat of the four panels, executed in 1945-46 has for its theme episodes from the Mahabharata. Here the central subject is that of a mighty battle. Preparations for the fight, the fight, the review and the requiem are dealt with dramatic brilliance.

The Kirti Mandir murals suffered on account of the wall space being cramped in between pillars. Further the decorative

arches and jali and did not serve any structural purpose or help in focussing attention on the painted area. Secondly and therefore the pictorial flavour of one panel differs from the next. They could not fall into a single unifying mood. With all these handicaps they attained a felicity not easily come across elsewhere.

In all these mural experiments one discerns the artist's commitment to the society the lived in and to its ethical norms and ideals. The Nandalal and artist was a responsible and a responsive member of his social milieu. The artist had to uphold the principles of harmony and sacrifice without which a culture could not attain its full potential. His sriniketan mural deals with the deal farmer who approaches his work not as drudgery and toil but as an occasion for celebration. The central figure Rabindranath does not represent the Poet as a iterary figure, but as the high priest of a ploughman, initiating him into a sacred relationship with the soil that sustains him. The soil nurtures him, his family and his village fraternity. He in his turn worships the soil and prays for fertility and a nourishing harvest. His mural on the old library verandah again is not a mere. *The Birth of Chaitanya,* the red gravel erosions of Khewai. and scenes of life at Santiniketan, are intimately related to the community for which it was painted. Pithy passages of humour, with animals and birds or scenes of the mistry and the painter at work, bear the imprint of an art closely linked with life. It helped the viewer to be aware of the endless surprise and joy that runs through our humdrum existence.

His Nati Puja in Cheena-Bhavan similarly seeks to blend with the aspirations of his seat of learning. Cheena-Bhavan was and is a centre of Buddhist studies in philosophy and as well as literature. The story of the Nati consecrating her life to the ideal of Buddhism graphically rendered on its walls

K.G. Subramanyan, *Murals of Nandalal*, Desh Vinodar, Nandalal No. 1839.

CHAPTER XV

NOTES ON HIS PAINTINGS

Nandalal's work *Sati* gives a clue to his attitude towards pictorial space and perspective. Abanindranath's paintings relied on a concept of space which could be termed Western; it included recession where the spectator seemed to be looking as though through a window or as if the scene was taking place on a stage. Abanindranath had studied the elements of pictorial language from Eruopeans and did not try to reorient the Western concept of space. However while teaching his students he gave them the freedom to arrive at their own solutions. Nandalal as can be seen from his early works like *Sati* or *Kaikeyee* centred his interest on the figures. The contour of the form and its relation to the format of the picture, the use of colours whose significance was local were his chief concern. The background of his pictures was an even, impenetrable space — either uniform in colour or an arrangement of blocks. This treatment of space was generally characteristic of his imaginative figure compositions.

However, in pictures that had their source in observed reality especially landscapes, visual perspective was freely used and

recession recorded without any ambiguity.

Nandalal generally preferred clarity of statement and because of this predilection he in course of time abandoned the wash technique where the colour washes tend to create a hazy and indeterminate atmosphere. Nandanlal took to painting in tempera which was more suitable for formal clarity and defined statements.

Nandalal's respect for the infinite variety of nature was one of the major factors that forced him out of the world of myths and legends. During his Silaidah vacation he was deeply moved by the vast spectacle of the river Padma. He was interested in the work of Mukul Dey who was with him, who had learnt the skill of making on the spot sketches. Thus we find him alternating between two types of work. The one formal as in his paintings *Pratiksha* or *Swarnakumbha* where there is elimination of detail and an emphasis on the silhouette. In such paintings his drawing attains the tension of a rightly tuned string instrument. The background has the function of setting off the figure. In another style characterised by free brushwork he painted the landscapes of Almora and other places — where the emphasis is on nature and atmosphere. A number of Santiniketan landscapes with their red roads, huts and roadside grass and trees also belong to this genre where there are hardly any lines.

A more playful masterly handling is seen in his Haripura posters. In these the background consists of bold patches of colour over which he drew a single figure or motif. The bright colours of the subject are defined by drawing in fluent brush strokes in black or any other contrasting colour.

Nandalal's paintings are of great range and show his acquainance with many phases of world art including the Egyptian, Assyrian and Far Eastern. He, however, kept aloof from Western styles partly perhaps due to his spirit of nationalism. His familiarity with Japanese art and artists made him conscious of the importance of line. Drawing was a definition, a distillation of form. Through line several individual variations of form were brought together, condensed, simplified and expressed in a general, universal statement.

But he was far too versatile a worker to persist in a single technique or pictorial solution. Besides his experiments in

styles he tried different kinds of ground as a base for painting. A consummate craftsman he was aware that the material used is a major chord in the pictorial symphony. The ground on which the artist works, if he is sensitive to its promptings, governs the style.

In his last years when he was confined to his house through physical debility he continued to play with forms tearing small pieces of brown paper into shapes and pasting them on a white ground. Thereafter with a few deft suggestions of pen or brush he would give these forms life and meaning. Towards the end he contented himself by drawing a few basic shapes such as a circle, triangles or lines. These had no reference to reality but were simply forms with their own identity

CHAPTER XVI

ART FOR THE COMMUNITY

Nandalal was ever willing to respond with warmth to the many creative ventures of Rabindranath. When it concerned production of drama Nandalal applied all his talent and ingenuity in designing costumes and stage decor to suit the dramatic tenor of the poet's plays. Santideo Ghosh has narrated that, prior to Nandalal's arrival stage decor was excessively naturalistic. For the set of a forest scene, different plants and creepers were actually arranged on the stage and along with them live fireflies were caught and pasted on the screens to create effect. Nandalal introduced simple, well balanced backgrounds with contrasting colours and a few decorative textile hangings. When Rabindranath devised new festivals like *Varsamangal, Vriksaropan, Halkarsan* or *Vasantotsava*, Nandalal would rise to the occasion and plan something that would lend these celebrations a new dimension. Nandalal's stage decor was characterised by simplicity and clarity. There was no confusion between the theatre and reality. He dispensed with superfluous accessories and relied on an unobtrusive neutral background that would lend relief to the dramatic action. In a typical decor dark navy blue or maroon curtains were usually

stretched end to end and broken by contrasting verticals of another shade for the entrance and exit. Limited areas of embroidery were hung providing decorative accents. The musicians and chorus occupied an enclosure behind a low balustrade.

In designing costumes he often thought of very simple aids. Batik scarves and strips of coloured fabric broke the costumes and were used as waist bands or light veils. The male actors wore these materials tied as a head dress. The flowing scarves would trail in different lengths and accentuate movement. Sarees, dhoties and skirts were carefully chosen so that they showed up clearly against the deep background.

Among his memorable creations should be mentioned the costumes he designed for *Tasher Desh* — (Rabindranath's dance drama "The Kingdom of Cards.") They were not only brilliant improvisations with simple means but effectively projected the dramatic content. Nandalal with his talent for design helped to transform the decor and costumes of the Bengali stage and the Santiniketan productions were informed by a particular style.

Rabindranath had been toying with the idea of writing suitable primers and reading material that would be a joy for small children. The idea lingered in his mind for over three decades. His early diaries and manuscripts show several drafts of couplets that he had improvised to introduce the alphabets and word making to the very young. He longed to replace the unimaginative lessons usually dinned into the sensitive ears of children, with new, fresh jingles which were full of whimsy, humour and fantasy. Rabindranath himself had been a victim of soulless schooling. He therefore invented rhymes that were meant to be enjoyed. He was keenly aware of the resonance of good nursery rhymes. He fondly remembered the first revelation of poetic sound in the line: *'Jal pare Pātā nare!"* In his reminiscences he records: "I remember again and again the phrase 'the rain patters, 'the leaf quivers'. Having crossed the stormy seas of the *Kara Khala* primer I have reached the sounds of the lines 'the rain patters, the leaf quivers' the sounds of which seemed to me like the primal lines of the first poet. Whenever I remember tha joy of that discovery I realise why rhyme is so essential to poetry. The words come to an end and yet do not end, the sounds are over but

not its resonance that the ear and mind seem to echo and repeat".[1] Rabindranath undertook to write elementary primers in the strain of popular *chhada'*. And what splendid literary toys they turned out to be. Rhyme after rhyme, and lesson after lesson he devised as an introduction to an imaginative use of language. These progressed not in the sense of Marxist jargon but step by step achieving greater alphabetic and phonetic complexity. The verses were designed with an ear for the child's love of jingles, rhymes and repetitive rhythms.

Rege bole dantya na
Jabo no to kakhana

Angrily the alphabet dental Na exclaims, "I will never never go!" The Poet weaves a magic scene wherein an alphabet speaks. Not only does it speak, it is even capable of human emotion and failings, not unlike a petulant child. And Nandalal was called upon to illustrate these lines. Thus started a magnificent duet of art and poetry. He created a parallel image and not a prosaic literal picture. He drew a small boy pulling at the leash of an unwilling goat. The goat may well be mooing "No No Never!" behind the boy. It is a delightful, fresh, simplified black and white linocut, executed with a sense of humour as well as with a terse formal structure. Another couplet is quoted here, just to bring home the happy marriage between the written word and the visual image.

Sal mudi diye ha kha
Kone bose Kase Khakha!

The alphabets Ha and Kha are sitting in a corner, all covered with a shawl and coughing (their lungs off) Kha Khha! The picture accompanying this couplet is again something more than a mere illustration. An old man bald and bearded, sits humped over an open book held on a reading stand. Behind him is a bolster. The old man is suggested in few white patches, and the child-student is left to imagine a doubled up man coughing asthmatically in a corner. The illustrations in this primer are not descriptive; they hint at situations and encounters. The prints of a woman cooking or boatman singing, are designed with masterly brevity. In *Sahaj Path* Nandalal played on visual chords, to the accompaniment of Rabindranath's verbal music. Truly it was a remarkable duet in

which two melodies played as counterpoints of a delightful fugue.

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Jiban smriti*, (Calcutta, Visvabharati Publications, 1969), p.3. Traslation mine. 'Kara Khala' are exercises in two syllables in a Bengali primer.

CHAPTER XVII

DEPRESSION

Rabindranath was all admiration for Nandalal's talent in making *Sahaj Path* a remarkable achievement as a well-produced primer. He persuaded Rathindranath to get the books printed as early as possible before imitators jumped into the fray. He knew that a host of bad coins drive good ones out of circulation by virtue of numbers. He even earmarked the sale proceeds of *Sahaj Path* for the development programmes of Kala-Bhavana. Such special treatment of Nandalal was reportedly not much appreciated by some colleagues in the administration of the Asram. But the Poet's will prevailed and much needed funds were made available to the slim budget at the disposal of Nandalal.

In the early part of 1930, Rabindranath went abroad. On this trip he also took his paintings with him. An exhibition of his works was arranged in Paris at Gallerie Pigalle. Signora Victoria O'campo assumed a self-appointed role as Tagore's impressario. This exhibition was followed by a chain of shows in Birmingham, London, Berlin, Moscow and several other metropolitan cities in Europe. The reception to Rabindranath as a painter by the press and connoisseurs was beyond anybody's imagination

and certainly beyond the artist's own expectations. The praise was universal. Rabindranath in this moment of triumph, remembered Nandalal. He wrote from Dartington, England:

> "Nandalal, my pictures have been able to place the ideals of Santiniketan art on a world forum. The major share of this renown is deservedly yours. You have from many sides encouraged me. In your writings, in celebrations, in your joys and by prevailing on me to continue, you have given me all encouragement. You have built an abode of fine art. It is not an art school — not a cage. It is a nest built with your living sacrifice. That is probably why in this atmosphere, one of my barren branches has suddenly borne fruit. You well know about the bamboo, which after a long period, at an unexpected moment, blossoms its final flower, before it ends its game of life. Such is my state! It is like the sun squandering its pot of paint on the western horizon, before he finally sets. Till now the bamboo lent itself to shaping into flute, but now with the contact of your springs of art, that which was invisible, has now in a short time emerged visibly. After that....Well all will be over!" (29 June 1930).[1]

Storms were gathering over the political horizon. Mahatma Gandhi was planning one more of his civil disobedience struggles, and in March 1930, after exhausting all avenues of discussion, persuasion and appeal, he declared war against the Salt-law. He undertook his historic Dandi march with a chosen batch of followers. The country was electrified, and millions of men and women, old and young, householders and businessmen, children, students and teachers all responded to his patriotic call. Nandalal has immortalised this moment, the first small but mighty step that set the tone of the nation's pilgrimage towards freedom. The solemnity, determination and indomitable will of Indian manhood, was symbolised in a black-white lino cut. Nandalal was moved by Mahatmaji's teachings of Ahimsa, self reliance and truthfulness to one's covictions. His insistance on truth above all expediencies and diplomatic subtleties had an inspiring message. It was an ethical model for all to strive, and emulate. This lino-cut of modest size depicting Mahatmaji stepping out with his walking stick, echoing the impregnable will to overcome all obstacles, has for the past fifty years served as a pro-

totype. Ramkinkar in his sculpture of the Mahatma on the march was undoubtedly influenced by this masterpiece.

During this period Nandalal had a feeling of restlessness and mental suffering. Was it because of his staying away from the vortex of national protest? Or was there any anxiety on account of his children or family life that nibbled at his equanimity and poise? In him there was a kind of void. Several minor incidents might have had a cumulative effect that disturbed him. The causes for such a situation are not known. But his mood of depression was noticed by many and first of all by Rabindranath who wrote to Abanindranath: 'Aban, who has played this vile role of Duryodhana in staging a Drona-Arjuna duel between you and Nandalal? I learnt about Nandalal's being invited to decorate the corporation hall (in Calcutta) and was greatly pleased. Mainly because, for sometime, I have observed that he has been depressed, that is not good for him. At this hour he needs encouragement'. Dated 1st Ashadh 1338.

This extract from a letter written from Darjeeling expresses his concern, about Nandalal's state of mind. It is not clear, whether there was some misunderstanding between him and his Guru Abanindranath about the Corporation murals that caused him distress. His own letter[1] to Prabhatmohan does not give any hint of it. In it he mentions having received a communication from the Corporation. Probably some Calcutta based artists had complained to Abanindranath that Nandalal was (allegedly) saying that the metropolitan artists were not equal to the task. That they had no experience in this technique, and that Santiniketan had better credentials to handle this decoration in view of its past record in murals. The rivalry between the Calcutta School of Art and Santiniketan may have been at the root of such slander. Nandalal was too self-effacing and never aggressive in such confrontations. He would hardly have made any such statements even had he felt anything like that. But Abanindranath might have taken umbrage to such alleged remarks. News of his displeasure reached Nandalal, making him feel miserable. He would never have thought of pitting himself against his master. His devotion towards the latter was not fragile and no one was more aware of his own limitations than Nandalal himself. He remained a student all his life, learning as he taught. He was incapable of mak-

ing any such claims. But all this storm in a tea-cup ended on it's own when the Corporation unable to make up its mind abandoned the idea, and the designs Nandalal made remained as cartoons.

During these years Nandalal worked on the idea of a crafts guild called *Karu Sangha*. It was not the usual kind of guild of professional craftsmen, but a novel and loose kind of association of artists who would live together, and devote a certain number of days in a month to commercial orders and commissions. They would donate part of the earnings to the association. For the rest of the month the members were free to work in their own creative fields. This guild acquired a large plot of land, and allotted portions of it to the memberes at reasonable prices. The atmosphere and the open sky of the *asram* was there to inspire them and the fraternity enjoyed a feeling of camaraderie.

Karu Sangha in its take-off stage received enthusiastic support from its original members like Ramkinkar, Masoji, Manindra Gupta, Hiren Ghosh, Kesavarao, Banbehari Ghosh, Indusudha Ghosh and others with Prabhatmohan as its Secretary. Nandalal was its Chairman and guiding spirit. Orders for various types of professional services kept coming to the Sangha such as book illustrations, albums with alpona designs and needle work. The artists also made batik textiles, leather goods and cement tiles for use in architecture. Painted post cards and handicrafts were sold in the stalls at the *Satui Pous* fair. The project began with a lot of enthusiasm. But lack of professional experience in management and sales promotion, and the exodus of many of the members caused the activities of *Karu Sangha* to peter out. In recent times a revival has been accomplished by Nandalal's daughters, Gauri and Jamuna. Now the *Sangha* is active again with the participation of some asram house wives. It is no more a man's preserve.

Gauri's wedding was celebrated in 1927 with traditional diginity and lavish entertainment, thanks to Abanindranath, who offered much needed funds for the expenses. The story goes that finding no way out of his economic difficulties, Nandalal went to Abanindranath - his first and last resort. Abanindranath chewing at his cigar saw 'Nando' standing by his side, and trying to articulate his intention in words. Abanbabu spoke first. 'I sup-

pose you are very busy with Gouri's wedding?' Nandalal nodded his assent. 'I know what you are standing here for! Speak, you need some money, do you not?' Nandalal had to agree. 'How much? Will Rupees three thousand be enough?' Nandalal overwhelmed with gratitude accepted the amount. When the wedding was over, and the jubilations had subsided Nandalal went again after a break of few weeks to repay what he had borrowed. Abanindranath in a fit of mock rage roared: "Ah! here comes a debter to repay his dues. Fine man! Begone! Are you showing off your wealth? I have spent the money for my grand-child's wedding! The matter ended there! Be off, before anything untoward happens!"

After that, the family spent some weeks at Darjeeling. Nandalal had some wellearned rest after a long time. Plans were made for Biswarup's departure to Japan for studies in the technical aspects of colour woodcut, Japanese methods of picture mounting and other Japanese skills. Biswarup. already a skilled journeyman in the painter's art even at the age of twenty sailed for Tokyo in 1930 leaving Nandalal a little sad at heart. No doubt, Nandalal looked forward to the completion of his training, which would be beneficial to Kala Bhavana, where his skills would be available to generations of students.

Gauri also left for Madras along with her lawyer husband Santosh Kumar Bhanja. She was employed by a wellknown industrialist as tutor in art to his daughters. Santoshkumar used his time gainfully by learning enamelling, silver work, and other crafts in the Madras School of Arts and Crafts.

It may be that one of the unconscious causes of Nandalal's depression was his separation from his two children. He was basically a home-bird, not given to wandering. He was happiest when surrounded by his sons, daughters, grand-children and students who were his spiritual progeny.

1. Letter of Rabindranath to Nandalal, dt. 29.6.1930 (sent from England, Rabindrabhavan archieves, Visvabharati, Santiniketan).

2. Letter of Nandalal to Prabhat Mohan Banerjee in personal collection, dt. 18.8.1931.

ing any such claims. But all this storm in a tea-cup ended on it's own when the Corporation unable to make up its mind abandoned the idea, and the designs Nandalal made remained as cartoons.

During these years Nandalal worked on the idea of a crafts guild called *Karu Sangha*. It was not the usual kind of guild of professional craftsmen, but a novel and loose kind of association of artists who would live together, and devote a certain number of days in a month to commercial orders and commissions. They would donate part of the earnings to the association. For the rest of the month the members were free to work in their own creative fields. This guild acquired a large plot of land, and allotted portions of it to the memberes at reasonable prices. The atmosphere and the open sky of the *asram* was there to inspire them and the fraternity enjoyed a feeling of camaraderie.

Karu Sangha in its take-off stage received enthusiastic support from its original members like Ramkinkar, Masoji, Manindra Gupta, Hiren Ghosh, Kesavarao, Banbehari Ghosh, Indusudha Ghosh and others with Prabhatmohan as its Secretary. Nandalal was its Chairman and guiding spirit. Orders for various types of professional services kept coming to the Sangha such as book illustrations, albums with alpona designs and needle work. The artists also made batik textiles, leather goods and cement tiles for use in architecture. Painted post cards and handicrafts were sold in the stalls at the *Satui Pous* fair. The project began with a lot of enthusiasm. But lack of professional experience in management and sales promotion, and the exodus of many of the members caused the activities of *Karu Sangha* to peter out. In recent times a revival has been accomplished by Nandalal's daughters, Gauri and Jamuna. Now the *Sangha* is active again with the participation of some asram house wives. It is no more a man's preserve.

Gauri's wedding was celebrated in 1927 with traditional diginity and lavish entertainment, thanks to Abanindranath, who offered much needed funds for the expenses. The story goes that finding no way out of his economic difficulties, Nandalal went to Abanindranath - his first and last resort. Abanindranath chewing at his cigar saw 'Nando' standing by his side, and trying to articulate his intention in words. Abanbabu spoke first. 'I sup-

pose you are very busy with Gouri's wedding?' Nandalal nodded his assent. 'I know what you are standing here for! Speak, you need some money, do you not?' Nandalal had to agree. 'How much? Will Rupees three thousand be enough?' Nandalal overwhelmed with gratitude accepted the amount. When the wedding was over, and the jubilations had subsided Nandalal went again after a break of few weeks to repay what he had borrowed. Abanindranath in a fit of mock rage roared: "Ah! here comes a debter to repay his dues. Fine man! Begone! Are you showing off your wealth? I have spent the money for my grand-child's wedding! The matter ended there! Be off, before anything untoward happens!"

After that, the family spent some weeks at Darjeeling. Nandalal had some wellearned rest after a long time. Plans were made for Biswarup's departure to Japan for studies in the technical aspects of colour woodcut, Japanese methods of picture mounting and other Japanese skills. Biswarup. already a skilled journeyman in the painter's art even at the age of twenty sailed for Tokyo in 1930 leaving Nandalal a little sad at heart. No doubt, Nandalal looked forward to the completion of his training, which would be beneficial to Kala Bhavana, where his skills would be available to generations of students.

Gauri also left for Madras along with her lawyer husband Santosh Kumar Bhanja. She was employed by a wellknown industrialist as tutor in art to his daughters. Santoshkumar used his time gainfully by learning enamelling, silver work, and other crafts in the Madras School of Arts and Crafts.

It may be that one of the unconscious causes of Nandalal's depression was his separation from his two children. He was basically a home-bird, not given to wandering. He was happiest when surrounded by his sons, daughters, grand-children and students who were his spiritual progeny.

1. Letter of Rabindranath to Nandalal, dt. 29.6.1930 (sent from England, Rabindrabhavan archieves, Visvabharati, Santiniketan).

2. Letter of Nandalal to Prabhat Mohan Banerjee in personal collection, dt. 18.8.1931.

CHAPTER XVIII

ARTIST OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

For Mahatma Gandhi, art and Nandalal were synonymous, like two sides of an equation. When any question that concerned art arose Gandhiji would refer it to "Nandababu". He would admit his lack of cultivation in this field with disarming honesty. But he was sure that he could claim an unerring instinct for spotting the right person for the right work. His discovery for art was Nandalal. In 1934, at Wardha, people around Gandhiji were talking about the education of Abdul Ghani, son of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. During Khansaheb's incarceration, Ghani was sent to Santiniketan. He was a handsome tall youth, impulsive by nature, who would often change his interests periodically. At one time he showed a passion for horse-riding and would gallop all over the place on a fiery stallion. Later he took to art, worked under Nandalal, and did a lot of clay modelling and sculpture. The discussions in the camp centred around Ghani's future, and his penchant for sculpture. Some one said, Islam forbids making images, and secondly even if Ghani had talent for sculpture, Nandalal was primarily a painter, and he would need another mentor. On hearing it Gandhiji retorted

"No, Nandalal knows the poetry of sculpture, and Ghani must learn it from him".

Gandhiji sent for Nandalal requesting him to come to Wardha some time in February 1936. Prafulla Ghosh and Nandalal travelled together on that trip. This was Nandalal's first encounter with Gandhiji. Nandalal was asked to take up the responsibility of organising and directing the decorations, and of arranging a suitable visual display for the Lucknow Congress. To say that the funds for this extensive work were limited would be an understatement. They were miserably poor. To add to the paucity, Nandalal was too shy to ask for those poor but available funds. Binodebehari, Prabhat Mohan and Masoji accompanied Nandalal to Lucknow where Asitkumar joined them. Nandalal undertook to arrange a historical panorama of Indian art. Copies of the Ajanta and Bagh murals, medieval paintings of the Jain, Rajput, and Mughal Schools, Kalighat Pats and works of Abanindranath and his disciples were shown in the exhibition. A catalogue specially brought out for the occasion had an illuminating introduction written by Binodebehari. Novel gates were designed. Mhatre an architect from Bombay supervised the construction. At one point it was noticed that a large space covered with corrugated tin sheets presented an unseemly sight. Hurriedly Jamini Roy was requisitioned to paint large panels to cover them. Hardly any money was left for Jamni Roy's services. Jaminibabu was in such straits in those days that he agreed to do this large work of ten by sixty feet for only four hundred rupees, on condition that he would be allowed to take away his work after the session. Gandhiji was greatly pleased. Nandalal's part in making a success of the session was appreciated. In his opening speech Gandhiji referred to the artistic arrangements saying: "Let me tell you that you will have an inkling of the inside even from where you are sitting. For in front of you are no triumphal arches but there are simply but exquisitely decorated walls done by Sj, Nandalal Bose, the eminent artist from Santiniketan and his co-workers who have tried to represent all the villager's crafts by simple artistic symbols. And when you go inside the art gallery on which Babu Nandalal Bose has lavished his labours for weeks, you will feel, as I did, like spending hours together there."[1]

The Faizpur session of the Congress followed almost on the heels of the one held in Lucknow. Barely five months had elapsed since Nandalal returned from Lucknow, when Gandhiji sent him another message, 'Come'. He wanted Nandalal to take charge of the entire work of the Faizpur meet. Nandalal cautiously wrote back to say that he was just a painter, while much of the task was architectural. Gandhiji countered by remarking: "Having received a little, our heart wants a full measure! I don't need a master pianist, a fiddler is enough for me!" The entire work in Tilaknagar — near Faizpur was once again handled by Nandalal and Mhatre. In the main pandal where the exhibition was arranged, Nandalal had the ingenious idea of sprouting wheat seedlings around the central pole. When the exhibition was thrown open to the public, visitors saw a round oasis of live greenary in the middle of a gravelled floor space. Everybody admired this novel way of beautification by pressing nature into service. Gandhiji was ecstatic on seeing it and once again expressed his delight in his speech:

> "Credit for the arrangements here belongs to the architect Sjt. Mhatre and the artist Sjt. Nandalal Bose. When Nandababu responded to my invitation a couple of months ago, I explained to him what I wanted and left it to him to give concrete shape to the conception. For he is a creative artist and I am none. God has given me the sense of art but not the organs to give it concrete shape. He has blessed Sjt. Nandalal Bose with both. I am thankful that he agreed to take upon himself the whole burden of organising the artistic side of the exhibition and he came and settled down here weeks ago to see to everything himself. The result is that whole of Tilaknagar is an exhibition in itself and so it begins not where I am going to open it but at the main gateway which is a fine piece of village art....Please remember that Nandababu has depended entirely on local material and local labour to bring all the structures here into being."[1]

Nandalal by now, was the artist laureate of the National Congress. Gandhiji would not think of anybody else. The work at these sessions was purely a labour of love, but to Nandalal it had a special attraction. It provided him with a site and material for trying out his novel experiments in art for the community. Gates,

pandals, landscape gardening and posters for social education could be planned and executed. It was an opportunity for creating art with social relevance. Above all, he could be close to Mahatmaji, a privilege he would not have liked to miss.

The next Congress session was to be at Haripura, near Bardoli. Once again Nandalal got a call, but as he was not feeling well, he pleaded his inability. This negative response had another reason. On hearing that Nandalal was once again awarded this assignment of national importance, some local artists gave public expression to their chauvinistic feelings. Why should a Bengali be requisitioned for work in Gujarat, when comparable talents were available here? Nandalal had by then got to hear of these ill feelings. But within a week of his letter to Gandhiji he turned up at the Bardoli camp. He was feeling unhappy about his earlier refusal. Nandalal's arrival was as unexpected as it was welcome. After a brief break Nandalal proceeded to Haripura and studied the problem on the site. He surveyed availability of local materials and craftsmanship. He reported back saying he had now sized up the extent of the work and could go ahead with it. Gandhiji could see that Nandalal needed rest, after his recent illness and present strain. He prevailed on Nandalal to accompany him to Tithal, a seaside resort nearby. Nandalal had an interesting anecdote from his Tithal stay. Nandalal had left his sandals on the beach and had gone for a long walk. On his return he found Gandhiji keeping watch over his footwear.

> "I knew these were Nandababu's sandals, and did not like that some stray dog should chew one away and leave the other to regret over!"

After that incident Nandalal gave up wearing sandals for a long time.

At Haripura, Nandalal turned the whole Congressnagar into an example of environmental art. Gates, pillars, exhibition, cluster of stalls, thatched shelters, landscape garden, meeting areas and residential tents were all decorated with local material of bamboo, thatch, and Khadi of different hues. Earthen pots and vessels were adorned with designs, tassels of paddy grass hung in rows, baskets and cane work were all used to lend the session an elegant rural atmosphere. To crown the effect, Nandalal plan-

ned posters which were later to become famous in our art history as "Haripura posters" — depicting Indian life in all its variety. The subjects included wrestlers, hunters, warriors, women at work, mother and child, carpenter, smith, spinner, husking women, cows, bulls, and other village animals. These humble themes of rural life were executed with the playful gaiety characteristic of folk art. Though folk in spirit the work had technical brilliance and sophistication of classical art. According to Binodebehari Mukhopadhyaya:

> "In these Haripura panels painted for the session, there is an ineluctable harmony of tradition and study based on observation. Each poster is different from the next in form as well as in colour, and yet there runs all through a strong undercurrent of emotional unity, lending a familial stamp. The artist has not looked towards any ideals either traditional or modern, but keeping an eye on the contemporary situation, has worked out his own goal. The stream of form and colour which flows over the subject, subordinating it, bring these posters into kinship with mural art."

The huge Congress campus, named Vithalnagar after Vithalbhai Patel was a sprawling area. Vinayak Karmarkar, a noted sculptor from Bombay modelled a giant bust of Vithalbhai in concrete. It was a remarkable feat, for its monumental size and for the speed with which it was erected in a record time of six days.

Nandalal not accustomed to professional jealousies, silently overheard whispers from the Gujarat and Maharashtra camps. He told himself: "If revered Bapu needs me, I would go to the end of the world riding over all abuse! Bapu is my shield!"

1. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 4.4.1936, (Gandhiji's speech at Lucknow Congress on 28.3.1936).
2. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 2.1.1937 (Gandhiji's opening speech at Faizpur Congress, on 25.12.1936).

CHAPTER XIX

A HUMANE AND KINDLY BEING

By nature Nandalal was affable but generally took sometime to overcome his reticence. Thereafter however he was a delightful company. Among his friends reference has been made to his schoolmates Rajshekhar Basu and Surendranath Ganguly. His other life-long friend was Ganen Maharaj who was a well wisher and always helpful in his difficulties. During his working years in Vichitra, Asitkumar Haldar and Sailendranath Dey were his companions.

Santiniketan gave him the companionship of many distinguished colleagues but he was more often seen with Tejeshchandra Sen. Tejesh Babu was a teacher of English, Bengali and other subjects but his special enthusiasm was for Botany. Trees and flowers had their own personality and both Nandalal and he were lovers of nature and gardening.

Another person with whom he was close was Nityananda Goswami generally called Gosainji. Gosainji was a devout Vaishnavite but had discarded all the external pretensions of the cult. He wore a beard instead of the traditional tuft on his head. He was a scholar in Pali and Sanskrit but for Nandalal it was not his

erudition that mattered, he loved the humane, sincere unassuming personality and open heart.

Another Sanskrit scholar who was Nandalal's friend was Haridas Mitra. Haridas Babu had studied Indian aesthetics extensively. He was often in the Kala-Bhavana Library and Nandalal shared with him his rather restrained humour.

Nandalal's choice of friends gives us some idea of his values. He preferred the innocent and childlike to others who were men of the world.

Nandalal's personal life and dedication were an example which spoke more to his students than his words. His working day would normally begin long before dawn. The early hours he spent tending his garden. The poultry and birds often came close to inspect their human neighbour and were objects for his contemplation. Moved by the small creatures and plants around him he took out a blank card and drew a crowing cock or an elegant spray of *Dolanchampa*. The morning sketch was a kind of ritual, it had priority over his morning cup of tea.

After an early breakfast he went straight to Kala-Bhavana carrying a shoulder bag with his sketching kit. His dress was always austere. a *gerua jama* (light brown long collarless shirt) and a pyjama. This was his usual outfit. In winter a warm shawl was added and in summer he carried a light towel (*gamcha*) to protect his head against the scorching sun. As he walked through the dormitories and studios he collected stray scraps of paper and litter and put them carefully in the dust bins. He loved neatness and order. His own studio in Kala Bhavana was a model in this respect, it was always fresh and clean with a bowl of water and his brushes neatly rinsed and arranged. The colours and pencils were kept with care and a glass palette always washed and ready for work. Besides, there would also be a fresh spray of flowers and the fragrance of incense.

During a break between studio classes he spent some time with his colleagues Binodebehari and Ramkinkar relaxing over a cup of tea or an occasional cigarette. He was not addicted to smoking but neither was he a puritan. In the classrooms he observed the students with shrewd attention. He could read their personalities at a glance by their manner of sitting, way of work and their response to one another. In the evening he usu-

ally visited the staff club called *Cha Chakra* (Tea Circle) where he was a popular member. It was a place where teachers and workers from other departments and offices gathered and exchanged greetings and the news of the day. Nandalal's routine was always enriched by occasional stops when he took out a card and made a note of some visual experience. His whole time was one of sustained contemplation of the pageant of life. A superficially eventless day had countless surprises for him.

Nandalal's students and colleagues carried an abiding impression of Nandalal who was not only kind at heart but who threw all considerations of personal safety or comfort to the winds when facing danger or any crisis. Some of the tales of this good Samaritan may be mentioned here and would go to show the artist as a man with a rare combination of humility, self-respect, kindness, generosity and courage.

A teacher has recorded a fire-fighting incident in which Nandalal had taken a leading part. "During those days I was on the staff in Santiniketan. It was afternoon, and suddenly I heard cries of 'Fire Fire' I rushed out and saw billows of smoke coiling up in the southern horizon, in a locality known as Gurupalli. Several of us ran to the large well where we all bathed. Each one used to have his own bucket. We found the boys had already made a dash to the site and were engaged in fire fighting operations. Students standing apart in a line were passing buckets hand to hand in a kind of military order. There was no confusion or panic. The task was done as if an engine was at work. At the head of the operation stood Nandalal passing buckets and directing the boys like Bonaparte conducting strategies of battle. It was an unforgettable experience. There was a lapse in my handling at which he administered a corrective word in no uncertain terms."[1]

Nandalal himself described this incident in a letter to Abanindranath by painting a hut on fire, along with which he wrote: "Last night Gopal babu's hut was burnt. Asit used to stay there earlier. People and their belongings have been saved, only the hut is gone. Rest all well." He was silent about his own role. He never claimed credit for any thing he did.

In another incident involving a Sisu-vibhaga boy and wild bees was still more dramatic and showed Nandalal's presence of

mind in the face of danger and his indifference to personal safety. It was a normal Wednesday gathering at the Asram mandir, and children, Pathabhavana students and other inmates of the Asram had congregated in long rows sitting on the mandir steps. Pandit Vidhusekhar Sastri was conducting the service. One naughty child a little late in coming, threw a stone at a hive of wild bees that hung amidst the branches of a tree nearby. In a moment there was utter confusion. People in the mandir ran helter skelter. Pandit Vidhusekhar Sastri was seen rushing out brandishing his upper garment in an attempt to ward off the stinging bees. But the child who had started the mischief was attacked in mass by the main swarm. He was completely covered by bees and his body was hardly visible. Nandalal presently broke out of the crowd, covered the victim with his shawl and picking him up in his arms rushed to a nearby house closing the door firmly against further onslaught. Ignoring danger to himself, he saved the boy, though both of them were very severely stung. Those who were witnesses recount the drama with great admiration for the daring rescue.

Once, some members of the staff were talking about hostel life, discipline of the students and so on. There was some mention of one of the hostellers being in the habit of masturbation. The discussion went on till some teacher suggested that an immoral habit of this type should be corrected by punishment. Nandalal was there during the discussions. As was his wont, he silently listened without comment. When pointedly asked for his views, he questioned the speaker with challenging firmness, "Can any one present lay his hand on his heart, and swear he has never masturbated?" The discussion ended there.

Gopal was an old man, a master craftsman in lacquer work who used to serve in the Sriniketan Silpa Sadana, where he worked and trained a few assistants. For sometime his absence went unnoticed. On enquiry Nandalal learnt that he was sick and lying unattended in a serious condition in a miserable hovel at Illambazar. The place was about ten miles from Santiniketan. Nandalal quietly asked Banbehari and Nishikanto to get their travelling kit ready and plan for an extended stay. Nandalal himself crammed his few belongings, not forgetting his inseparable sketching cards and ink-stand into a bag and led the group to the

bus stand at Bolpur. They reached Illambazar to find Gopal very poorly. Nandalal organised a time-table of nursing duties and requisitioned whatever medical aid was available locally. During the week when Gopal was recovering they slept in a narrow verandah open on one side and ate a modest fare of *muri* (puffed rice) and tea from a nearby tea-shop. Gopal after his recovery blessed the 'baboos' of Santiniketan who had saved his life.

During the infamous famine of Bengal in 1942-43 hordes of villagers with their children crowded around the *Asram* srefectories. There would be a regular scramble for leftovers. Often the scramble was between men, women, children and dogs. The sight was harrowing. The spectre of hunger stalked over to the land. Nandalal organised a batch of students who shepherded the crowd and made them sit in rows with their bowls. Buckets of gruel cooked in the *Asram* kitchen were taken out to feed the hungry. The finances for the mass feeding were collected by subscription from all the *Asram* members. The sight of perishing human beings was truly a terrible one. But Nandalal could take stock of the situation and act with humanity.

Another example of Nandalal's consideration for the handicapped, is highlighted by the following case. A blind boy wandering around the *Asram* caught Nandalal's eye. The boy, a shade darker than Nandalal himself was called Kalo. On enquiry he discovered that he was a Muslim and had a keen longing to learn music. The boy recounted his misfortunes. He was poor and being blind was abandoned by his parents. It was later discovered that he was an epileptic and would time and again curl up in jerks when he got an attack. Nandalal arranged for his accommodation, in a small hut in the hostel complex. He also saw to it that he could eat in the Kala Bhavana kitchen where Kalo became popular on account of his fine voice and melodious singing. He would often imitate the disks of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan — the maestro of classical Indian music. Kalo's grasp of Rabindra Sangit was remarkable, and Nandalal gave him the assignment of singing at the *Upasana Mandir* everyday. He was granted a monthly stipend for his food and contingencies. A student warden, a hosteller from Bombay was given charge of keeping an eye on the welfare and needs of Kalo-mia. Once it happened, that Kalo was going through the ordeal of an epileptic fit.

The student in charge was struggling to keep Kalo's mouth open as otherwise he might get lock-jaw. Kalo was foaming at the mouth and he had fouled his clothes in the absence of any control over the calls of nature. He was in a mess and the attending student found it difficult to handle the situation. Nandalal who was passing by, saw the state of things and promptly took charge. He first removed Kalo's clothes, and helped in removing the faeces from the body. Kalo was scrubbed clean, redressed and laid on the bed. Nandalal did not shy away from this unpleasant job. For him service rendered to anyone was itself a high reward.

On many occasions, Nandalal exhibited a sense of sacrifice, and selfless service, and while doing so, he did not lose his composure but always maintained certain equanimity.

When Rabindranath was critically ill he was taken to Calcutta for treatment in July 1941. Several *Asram* members went with him to be near at hand for nursing him. Nandalal too was there. Finally the treatment was of no avail and the inevitable end came on August 8th. Nandalal though heavy at heart worked a finely designed bier for the Poet's last journey. The body was laid on it, anointed with sandal paste and, incense lighted. Amidst Vedic chants and rituals, the bier was lifted. The crowds who came for a last glimpse were stunned with sorrow. Nandalal was seen organising the movement of the milling crowds at the gates of Jorasanko. For Nandalal, Rabindranath had been his guardian angel and a sanctuary in difficult times. He felt orphaned and so lonely. Never before had he felt orphaned and so lonely. Never before had he felt such a sense of loss or emptiness. For a long time he would go about his work sadly. In those hours of crisis, he had to remind himself of the verse from the Gita: "He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrow and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, he from whom passion, fear and rage have passed away, he is called a sage of settled intelligence (*Sthita prajna*)."[2]

1. Vijay Lal Chattopadhyaya, *Karmaveer Nandalal*, (*Yugantar*, 1.5.1966)
2. *Bhagwad-Gita*, II, 56, Tr. S. Radhakrishnan, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1948).

CHAPTER XX

NANDALAL AND HIS STUDENTS

Educational excursions and picnics had an important role in Kala Bhavana where they were an integral part of the programme of studies. Usually such tours were planned to historical sites, or places of natural beauty like Rajgir, Bhimbad, Kharagpur and so on. Nandalal was always with and amidst his students at such camps. Work included not only art studies but the experience of working and sharing an open air life. Pitching tents, cooking and organising meals was part of training as was sketching and study. The day generally ended with camp fires and an exhibition of talent and games. Nandalal and other teachers came close to the students on such informal occasions. He noticed everything with a smile and gave directions like the patriarch of a large family.

Among hundreds of students whom Nandalal nurtured and groomed into artists, several worked in different parts of India, and contributed according to their lights to the cultural life of the place where they worked. For sometime many of the public schools and other educational institutions preferred to employ artists trained by Nandalal. His very name was a recommenda-

tion to get a reasonably good job as art teacher or designer. Kala Bhavana in its early phase had not much use for syllabi, timetables, years of training or examinations, Nandalal's word was final.

When Binodebehari first came to Santiniketan he joined Pathabhavana that is the school section. Later he, along with Dhiren Krishna Deb Barman changed over to training in art. Binode's eyes were congenitally weak. One of his diseased eyes was removed while he was yet a boy. He had to work with the other eye wearing a thick lens. Initially Nandalal worried about this frail youth tried to discourage him from his interest in painting. He even expressed his anxiety to Rabindranath. Rabindranath pondered for a while, and asked: "You say his eye is ruinously weak, and that he has to hold a paper hardly six inches away to see what is on it, this must give him considerable strain. Anyway what does he keep busy with mostly?" Nandalal replied: "Well he does nothing, but sketch and paint." Rabindranath clinched the matter by saying "Let him do nothing else."

Binodebehari had a sharp intellect and an unusual visual memory. He would sketch, study, draw and paint. And with his extraordinary grasp of forms in their essence and with his acute sensibility for the dynamics of picture space, he charted an individual path of development. He had a scholarly mind, but his scholarship did not get lost in factual data, chronological quibbling or in controversies of identification. He could reach the core of the subject and deal with essentials in a lucid exposition. Nandalal when he saw the worth of this youth asked him to continue in Kala Bhavana to assist in teaching and in the Art library. Binodebehari had an early introduction to art-history through Stella Kramrisch who in 1921-22 taught Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian and Far Eastern art. She also gave an informative account of the contemporary situation in European art, and thus opened for these young receptive minds new vistas of world art, which were not generally within the reach of the average Indian art student. Always responsive to fresh insights, Binode poured over books and illustrations of Far Eastern art in the Kala Bhavana library. In 1938 he went on a study tour to Japan. There he had opportunities to see the original classics by Japanese masters. He returned to Santiniketan, to work as before with Nandalal and

Ramkinkar in teaching. Nandalal had great regard for Binode's ability as an original painter, and also thought him an excellent teacher. Binode's leaving Santiniketan in 1948, was a shock and a matter of deep regret to him.

His other major disciple Ramkinkar had come to Santiniketan with the recommendations of Ramananda Chattopadhyaya. Ramkinkar had no formal education but still revealed a remarkable talent. He was adept in both painting and sculpture. As he progressed he developed into one of the major sculptors in the country. Ramkinkar always delighted in experiment. and even while water-colour and tempera were the usual techniques practised, he often painted in oils. He remained all his life in Santiniketan except for occasional journeys to Delhi and Baijnath, yet he kept abreast of the art movements in Europe and elsewhere. He was the first Indian sculptor to create abstract or non- objective forms. His outdoor composition such as "Santhal family" and "To the Mill" were monumental and unique, bursting with an exuberant life-spirit. Nandalal was not much of an admirer of modern trends but he did recognise Ramkinkar's creative genius. He gave him his affection and encouragement in spite of the latter's Bohemian ways.

Binodebehari and Ramkinkar became artists of major signifance and there is no doubt that Nandalal's influence in moulding them by teaching, example and guidance was crucial to their development. The master with his two talented disciples helped in raising the prestige of Kala Bhavana to that of a major centre for art studies.

CHAPTER XXI

NANDALAL'S VIEWS ON ART

Nandalal was frank and modest about his inability to express himself in speech. When called upon to preside over meetings, or introduce visiting dignitaries, he would shrink into the background, leaving the formalities to more vocal colleagues. He was at his best in relating anecdotes or citing metaphors to illustrate his point. Often the story took precedence over the point but enough would be told by allusion to hint at the truth.

Rabindranath's paintings appeared to him independent of the visual, factual, material world. Art, Nandalal felt had to be such an essence; it should have the flavour but not the flesh of individual facts. He admired Ganganendranath's surface patterns of the cubist family on the same grounds. In the case of Ramkinkar too, his acceptance of his work was probably limited to a two dimensional approach towards Cubism, whereever it was noticeable. In his recollection of conversations with Rabindranath he states:

"Gurudev once told me that truth, however you may define it, has the power of attraction inherent in it. It must draw your

inner self towards itself, and the more you open yourself to it, the more you feel its hypnotic influence. The unnatural through its very novelty may attract us for some time, but the attraction wears off if there is no truth in it. The very fact that Gurudev's experiments in the grotesque instead of repelling us continue to attract us more and more as time passes, proves that the element of truth is not a negligible factor."

To Nandalal all Western art was based on visual observations, and all Eastern art on the rhythm of living things as registered through the artist's sensibility. In his estimate Cubism was suspect, and his favourite reprimand to students who attempted to be facile was *'Cubism Tubism cholbe na!'* (Cubism and that sort of thing won't do.)

Rabindranath in his casual conversations with Ranee Chanda asks: "Are you painting these days? Is what I have been doing, painting? I feel that my work consists only of criss-cross, whip-lash strokes: I told Nandalal as much, but he does not teach me, he only maintains a smiling silence!"

Nandalal had no illusions about his ability to teach or Rabindranath's capacity to learn methods or techniques. The aging Poet was fond of teasing his younger friend by imploring to teach him art. Nandalal was also familiar with the latter's total aversion to discipline. Rabindranath had sought freedom from establishments that insisted on grammar, musical scales, philosophical schools or techniques of art. He was by nature a lone wayfarer, and adventurer, learning by creating. Classroom lessons, study by rote, the conventional teacher — disciple relationship all this seemed to him a tedious waste of time and sensitivity. The very idea of Santiniketan grew as an organically natural development of individuals, each unique in his or her own way, willing to learn in an atmosphere of enquiry. Nandalal therefore wisely chose a smiling silence. He was of a different mould. He had faith in the teacher-disciple relationship. He believed that a study of techniques, the classics and nature were basic prerequisites for any art work, great or little. He expected loyalty, unquestioning faith or *'Sraddha'* from his students. He, in his turn was generous and paternal towards them. He tried to understand, help and encourage what he considered the best in them. To his mind conditioned by such influences as those of Swami

Vivekananda, Abanindranath, Havell and Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath's paintings should have been initially a dismaying experience; but when the initial shock wore off and when he was able to disengage his vision from his habit of carrying the measuring scale of tradition, he did see the worth of Rabindranath's art. The poet himself unsure about his efforts in painting till the end; did not feel on firm ground. For all the praise and critical writings of friends and admirers he had little confidence. On the other hand Nandalal's smiling silence was one of comprehension.

His stray musings on art were numerous, in them he expressed his aims in pithy word pictures. Some of these are cited here:

— Subject of art and the mind of the artist are like an object and light. Matter absorbs the sun's light: that is the nature of imitative art. While a glass, mirror or water reflect light: that is the nature of Indian or Eastern art. This art did not tread the path of imitation, nor did it need to be abstract or be afraid of imitation. It's truth exists between the form and the formless.

— Paintings have two aspects: expression and architecture. The artist should know the currents and styles of the various traditions. He may use whatever is necessary according to his desires. The artist is an Emperor. All styles and techniques are aides attending, following or serving him. Each may become his commander-in-chief, minister, queen, prince, councillors or take any other role.

— Under the limitless sky everything grows, takes birth, dies and is born again. Incessant change from one form to another moves in an evolutionary cycle. If one can assess these transformations, one can be nature's poet or nature's painter. The great Chinese painters were able to do this aright.

— There is a secret skill of drawing; while drawing a tree, if one is lost in innumerable details and complexities one should abandon the attempt. One has to see it against its sky. Only then one discovers that the form seen against it is in our grasp automatically. Then one has found its real structure and shape. It's *'swarup'* is achieved.

— When I compare my paintings with Gurudev's, I find

mine lack lustre and are lifeless. Formal beauty, grace, clarity, florescence all these have been attained. Now what is needed is life force, strength and vitality. If it was not for our students I would have stopped painting and taken up sculpture, working on images alone. Whatever I have drawn, three forths of it is nothing. I have drawn a man like man, a tree like a tree, they were not transformed into paintings. *Pats* appear better.

— Gardens are of two kinds. When one sees the first kind, one feels there is a gardener or worker. While the other type makes us conscious of a lover. Have you not noticed how girls appear just after their marriage? How different they look? One can see they have entered into a relationship with some special person. Art is like that. In good art there is no force, no violence.

— The child draws in natural simplicity, because its knowledge and means are limited. A mature artist also reaches simplicity because his knowledge and understanding are extensive. He knows what he wants, and the material and techniques necessary. He also knows their limitations. If he wishes to create an image, he carves off wood, or stone or models clay with only one aim. He says: "You may stay wood, or stone or clay. But you must also take my stamp and express my inner self". Good art is all three: subject, material and the artist himself.

— Where can we find a thing emptied of its *'Sadrisya'*? Even if we chance upon it in meditation or gnostic awareness, how can we see or show it? And what joy can be there in such viewing? *Sadrisya* is not a simile nor is it a decoration. It is not something to elaborate or fuss over; it is not a colourful novelty. It is much deeper and inward. When you strike a string of the sitar, several others resonate. The resonance enriches the music. *'Sadrisya'* is that. You cannot will it, it resonates of its own accord.

— In art, there is nothing proper or obscene. It is far above the mundane. The artist's vision is a worshiper's vision. The artist's offering is like a prayer. His is not to accept his own offering. His part is to give, to express and to create.

— The Mahout urges the elephant with a prod. There he

opens a wound. He does not let it heal. He merely touches it with the end of the goad. It is the same with the artist. He goes about with a wound, with pain. It is not depression or unhappiness, without pain there is no art.

— Hokusai used to say: One who cannot walk, how can he run? One who cannot run, how can he dance? Drawing is like walking, formal technical skill is like running, and painting real masterpieces is like dancing. In other words, it is an aesthetic harmony of form and emotion. Binode and Kinkar can run, they can also dance. They are always creative, ever examining things afresh.[1]

Nandalal 's reveries and monologues are illuminating. Their flavour can be rightly enjoyed if one is familiar with his style of teaching.

Nandalal was pragmatic about fine art as a professional career and as a means of livelihood. He had no illusions about the ability of contemporary society to absorb and support the arts. He also knew that though many students joined the art department all were not destined to become competent artists. Some were good, a few exceptional, while many were mediocre. The ones with an average talent formed the majority and he was concerned about their future. This was one reason why he introduced training in various crafts. A Kala Bhavana student had to learn different handicrafts such as Batik, leather work and so on. Girl students were expected to take up embroidery, weaving and similar skills. The students had ample opportunity to practise design and work with their hands. Apart from its creative role a knowledge of crafts he felt would be a second weapon in the students' struggle for existence.

1. Kanai Samanta, *'Silpir man, Silpir Chokha'*. (*Nandan*, Nandalal no. 1982, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan).

CHAPTER XXII

GANDHIJI'S VISIT — 1945

Mahatmaji would usually keep himself informed about Santiniketan and its affairs. He had given his word to 'Gurudev' that he would faithfully try to nurture his cultural bequest to the nation. In spite of his sincerity Mahatmaji could not tear himself away from political demands. Still he managed to make a special trip to the *Asram* in December, 1945.

The evening *Upasana* — prayer meeting — was held on the spacious grounds of Gour Prangan. A neatly decorated dias was arranged in front of Sinha Sadan. Several songs were sung. The most moving was that by Santidev Ghosh, whose recital of Gurudev's song:

Jethai thake Sabar adham diner hote deen
Seikhane je charan tomar raje
Sabar piche, sabar niche Sab-harader majhe.

"Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest and lowliest and lost. When I try to bow to thee my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest and lowliest and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest and lowliest and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest the lowliest and lost."[1]

A great hymn was movingly sung, and could not have been more appropriate. As soon as the first strain of the song wove its magic around the reigning silence, the audience was thrilled. The orange orb of the full moon rose in the east spreading its silver sheen over the vast gathering. After the song, Mahatmaji spoke and expressed his joy in this home coming. He paid tributes to Gurudev and told his listeners to live up-to the ideals for which he strove, lived and died.

During this visit Mahatmaji met members of the staff to listen to their difficulties and problems. Nandalal and Kshitimohan Sen spoke about their predicament. They said they could not be confident who would take over their tasks when they retired. Gandhiji's answer was straight and forthright:

> "As I listened while Nandababu and Kshitimohan babu were speaking I said to myself 'Here is a real difficulty: but it is a difficulty of our own making. If a person directs a big department, he is expected to transmit what he stands for, to some one who can be termed as his successor. Yet it is the dominant cry of these stalwarts that they are unable to find a suitable successor for their respective departments. True, these are departments of a special character. I know these departments and I know Gurudev's views about them. Speaking generally may I venture to suggest that there is no difficulty but can be overcome by *tapascharya*? It is almost an untranslatable word, the nearest approach to its true meaning being perhaps 'single minded devotion'. But it means more than that. Whenever in the course of multifarious activities I have been confronted with a difficulty of this character, the single minded devotion has solved my difficulty in a manner which I had never expected. My answer is that the ideal before you is not to represent Bengal, or even India. You have to represent the whole world".

While taking leave of Santiniketan, Indira Devi asked him: If he thought that there was too much of song and music in the life style of Santiniketan?

Gandhiji's reply was that "The music of life was in danger of being lost in the music of the voice."[2]

When Nandalal expressed his anxiety about a worthy successor, he may have been apprehending some chaotic changes or a

kind of war of succession. Had he some premonitions about the decline that was to set in? Or was he anticipating Binodebehari's desertion? In any case, the close bonds between him and Binodebehari were undergoing severe strain, and probably that made him do some loud thinking in the presence of Mahatmaji.

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, (London, Macmillian and Co., 1917), p.8.
2. M.K. Gandhi, *Visvabharati news*, Vol. XIV No. 9.

CHAPTER XXIII

ADMIRERS AND CRITICS

In the long span of his artistic career, Nandalal had won innumerable admirers; among them one may name Sister Nivedita, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath, Ordhendu Coomar Ganguly, Jagadishchandra Bose, Suniti Kumar Chatterji and others. In later years he had also his share of critics who failed to see his worth, in their general denigration of the Bengal school. Very few of his severest critics cared to study the strong vital work he did in the thirties and forties. They had made up their minds on the basis of their acquaintance with weaker painters. But Nandalal was indifferent to praise or censure, in equal measure. He could take that attitude only because he was sure within himself of the bedrock on which his conviction was founded. Along with firm faith he had had the rare good fortune of being in the shelter of Santiniketan and enjoying the understanding of Rabindranath. Here he was uninvolved in the metropolitan rat-race of people running after money and patronage. He could think and meditate, he could examine himself and this enquiry lead him to find truth in simplicity of expression.

Coomaraswamy was among the first few serious scholars who recognised the intensity of Nandalal's art. He wrote:

"Nandalal Bose is already well known as one of the most brilliant of the still too small school of Indian painters, who following Abanindranath's lead have shown that the Indian creative instinct is still a living power and that there is a deeper meaning in Indian nationalism than mere demands for rights. That deeper meaning is to be found in the significance for humanity of the living genius of the Indian people. The driving force behind the national movement is still too unconscious of its real aims, is the 'will to be free' of this genius of the Indian people. Most precious are the signs few though they yet appear, of that growing inner freedom, which alone can make political and economic ends worth achieving."[1]

Rabindranath's admiration was undimmed from the days of *Chayanika* (1909) when he had called him to illustrate that collection of his poems. He never failed to encourage or see the truth of his art. In a poem eulogising Nandalal's work he says:

"You maker of pictures a ceaseless traveller among men and things
Rounding them up in your net of vision
and bringing them out in lines
far above their social values and market price
Those nameless tramps fading away every moment into shadows
were rescued from their nothingness
and compelled us to acknowledge
a greater appeal of the real in them
than is possessed by the rajahs
who lavish money on their portraits of dubious worth
for fools to gape at and wonder."[2]

Ordhendu Kumar Ganguly was Nandalal's colleague in his South Indian journeys and in the Indian Society of Oriental Art. In his tribute he recorded that:

As the modern interpreter of older forms of thought, he was nevertheless a modern artist, and was one among us, sharing many of our views, and many of our experiences. In guise of his mythic theme, Bose comes with a message to modern life, like Blake; the fact that it is couched in an old imagery may delay its acceptance, but will not reduce its real value...We are indebted to him for recovering our racial imagery from the nar-

row religious dogmatism in which it was buried and presented it in a new and in some sense, original dress suited to the spirit of the times, which will not bend its knees to an image of Siva, but will not refuse to bow to fundamental truths of philosophical concepts underlying the Saivaite imagery, or for that matter any other form of imagery."[3]

For Mahatma Gandhi, Nandalal was art and art was Nandalal. The tribute he paid to Nandalal was simple and sincere. He said in his Faizpur speech:

"For he is a creative artist and I am none. God has given me the sense of art but not the organs to give it a shape. He has blessed Nandalal Bose with both".

Elsewhere he had remarked that Nandalal understood the poetry of sculpture, even when he was not a sculptor. Binodebehari Mukherjee, one of Nandalal's noted disciples wrote about his vast ouvre in the form of studies and sketches:

"The sheer immensity of his genius will remain unknown without reference to his drawings in the same way as the richness of Rembrandt's genius without the latter's drawings. These sketches of Nandalal are many in number as they are various in subject and technique, and through these we approach the artist's personality as we would through his diary. These show again his power of viewing the objective world from various angles and an ability to arrive at an analytical understanding of the essence of things."[4]

Satyajit Ray, the celebrated film maker who was in Kala Bhavana as a student of Nandalal made a candid confession while paying his tribute to the master.

"I do not think my 'Pather Panchali' would have been possible if I had not done my years of apprenticeship in Santiniketan. It was there that, sitting at the feet of *'Master-Mashai'* I learnt how to look at nature and how to feel the rhythms inherent in nature."

On the debit side one comes across Amrita Shergil's acid comments on Nandalal. These were never meant for publication, being purely of private interest and personal expression. In a few of her

letters to the art historian Karl Khandalwala she said:

"Really the more I see of Nandalal Bose's work the more convinced I feel that his talent is merely an appearance, an illusion. The man is apparently clever and has the faculty of distinguishing a good picture from a bad one, and sometimes under the inspiration of the particular school he is influenced by at the moment (for he lets himself be consciously cold bloodly influenced, his work proves that) succeeds in producing a good thing. Left to his own resources he is arid. Now the picture in your possession for instance is quite an attractive little piece of Japanese -cum-Ajanta art. But these illustrations (The Buddha's life series, published in the *Time of India* Annual 1938). They are postively painful.".[5]

Deviprasad Roy Choudhary also had lamented Nandalal's lack of appreciation for works of European art. He wrote:

"Its surprising that with all his broad minded attitude, Nandalal sees aesthetic excellence only in that art which follows the footsteps of the indigenous tradition. He does not realise that there is no caste-system in the realm of beauty. He does however recognise castes in particular types of techniques. In other words, he believed that only those techniques which he accepted as indigenous, should be followed by Indian artists! This mental orientation on close scrutiny would show that this partiality is somewhat like a mother's attraction for her child.[6]

With all the praise around him not entirely unmixed with blame, he continued to work and walk along his chosen path, in silent dignity.

1. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Modern Review*, Sept 1909.
2. Rabindranath Tagore, *Visvabharati Quarterly* Vol. 34 (1,2,3,4), 1968-69.
3. O.C. Ganguly on *Nandalal, Viswabharati Quarterly* vol. 34 (1,2,3,4) 1968-69.
4. Binodebehari Mukherjee, on *Nandalal Visabharati Quarterly*, vol. 34 (1,2,3,4), 1968-69.
5. Amrita Shergil in a letter to Karl Khandelawala.
6. Deviprasad Roy Choudhary, on *Nandalal, Niriksha*, Nandalal number, 1351, p. 77.

CHAPTER XXIV

EVENING YEARS

Nandalal officially retired in 1951, when he was in his seventieth year. He had by then rendered over three decades of rich service to the life of Santiniketan and to the growth of Kala Bhavana in particular. But to his interest in work, there could be no retirement. Kala Bhavana was woven into the very texture of life. He was a one man directory of the alumni for whom he had worked as placement-in-charge. He kept track of most of them; time and again he sent them picture postcards and enquired about their problems and welfare. Most of the students remembered him for his touching affection and care. They would not have hesitated to serve him in any way if Nandalal had wanted it. In their illness he had looked after them, had brought food with his own hands and had spent money on their medicines. When in difficulty students would always approach him and seek his advice and help. If he tendered any monetary help, he would act as if he would feel obliged at its acceptance. He was so full of natural grace and consideration for the needy and the deprived. If at any time he gave vent to his irritation and ire, in the presence of students for their lapses, he would return after some time and smile away the damage done

by suggesting that one should blame the mindless mood and not the man who is always human behind the mask of irritation! He was ever generous towards other's failures and seldom indulged in gossip or rumour.

He genuinely felt a sense of personal loss when Binodebehari left Santiniketan for Nepal. For Nandalal it was an act of desertion. Some misunderstanding had grown over casual remarks which getting twisted and distorted in their passage from mouth to mouth had done the damage. Benodebehari sensitive to any whisper of reproach, left Santiniketan a disillusioned man. But in spite of the separation Binodebehari held within him a deep respect and felt a kinship to his teacher. Many honours came his way in his mature years when he had given the best part of his life and his most sincere efforts and talents to the cause of art and to the enhancement of nation's prestige. He was called upon to illuminate the orginal text of the Constitution of India, by Jawaharlal Nehru. He did a remarkable job with the assistance of Biswarup, Gouri, Jamuna, Perumal, Kripal Singh and other students of Kala Bhavana. The illuminated pages were decorated with astonishing skill using indigenous techniques of applying gold-leaf and stone colours. The Constitution of India was thus embellished by the artist laureate of the country.

Honours started coming one after the other during the last fifteen years of his life. Doctor of letters, medals, Desikottama, Padma Vibhushan, Dadabhai Nauroji memorial prize, and Fellowships of various learned bodies like the Lalit Kala Akademi, The Asiatic Society, The Academy of Fine Arts Silver Jubilee medal and many more strung in a veritable garland. Yet he remained calm and unattached like the vedic bird which sits on its high perch observing without participation the antics of its alter-ego.

His wife, Sudhiradevi understood the demands of this genius. She felt that Nandalal in his evening years needed to be mentally and emotionally alone. She remained near enough but a little apart to allow Nandalal to meditate through his work. Almost everyday he would sit with a fresh paper before him, and allow his hand to create at random. Hundreds of such works were done, just in black and white, in forms that evolved like trailing clouds in the pure transparancy of the autumn sky.

A period of illness lasted for sometime. The degeneration of the body had set in. His physical powers were fading. His mental alertness was playing hide and seek with memory. At the end he would forget faces, and recollection became difficult. The end came on April 16th, 1966, just a day after the Bengali new year, the first of Baisakh.

Sudhiradevi was the source of inspiration of his first success *'Sati'*. Probably she feared that the sight of her *'Siva'* would unsettle her in some rash unpremeditated act of a death wish. She locked herself up in her room and never trusted herself to have the *'last darsan'*. Her youngest daughter rushed to call her out. Her response was 'leave me alone'. The bier bearers who had come to the gate, lingered for sometime and went ahead in dismay and surprise, at the strange reaction of his life-partner. Little did they know her inner turmoil and of the scorching fire of sorrow, in which she had thrown herself to burn out the dross and dregs of temporal thoughts.

Santiniketan mourned the loss of its master artist. The nation was shocked to hear the sad news of his death. Condolences, tributes, reminiscences, legends, obituaries, photographs, started appearing in the press all over India.

Binodebehari Mukherjee's comments on his guru's passing away voices what all those who came in contact with Nandalal felt: "I have not yet been able to get over the feeling of loss which is akin to witnessing a familiar and mighty tree blasted by a storm and lying uprooted. History will remain witness to his creative powers. The future will rejoice over it. Biographies will be written. Only, men of the future will miss the human touch of Nandalal's exceptional personality."[1]

1. Binodebehari Mukherjee, Obituary tribute, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 29.4.1966.

CHAPTER XXV

GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS & WORDS

Achalayatana:	Name of a play by Rabindranath Tagore. Tr. in English as King of the Dark Chamber.
Ahimsa (sk):	Non violence.
Alpona:	Ritual floor decoration done with white paste of rice powder, or colour.
Arjuna (sk):	One of the Pandavas characters from Mahabarata.
Artha (sk):	Wealth-economic well being.
Asana:	Seat, posture.
Asram Sangbad:	Santiniketan Patrika: News letter of Santiniketan in its early years.
Basu Vigyan Mandir.	Bose Institute of Science in Calcutta.
Bel:	A ball sized fruit with hard shell.
Bharat Darshan (sk):	Seeing India in an extensive travel or pilgrimage.
Bhuma (sk):	Plenitude.
Biryani:	Rice preparation enriched with meat.
Bonzai:	Japanese art of culturing dwarf trees in flower pots.

Bramhacharyasram:	An abode for disciples. The orginal name of the Institution founded by Tagore at Santiniketan.
Brahmananda Sahodara:	Same as the divine joy.
Charka:	Spinning wheel.
Chhada:	Popular rhyme in couplet - a jingle.
Chayanika:	Collection: First anthology of Tagore's poems in Bengali.
Dakshina:	Token offering to one's teacher or priest.
Dakshiner Verandah:	The southern verandah in Jorasanko: well known as a cultural haunt.
Daksha yajna (sk):	Sacrifice performed by Daksha — father of Sati — Parvati in which Lord Siva was insulted, a mythological passage from Maharashtra.
Dharma — (sk):	Law, ethical principle of life, religion.
Dhamma chakka Pabattana - (Pali):	Setting the wheel of law in motion. This refers to the famed sermon of the Buddha in Saranath.
Dhritarashtra (sk):	The blind king of Kurus, father of Duryodhana, a character from Mahabharata.
Dolan Champa:	A white flower with delicate fragrance.
Drona—Arjuna Yudha (sk):	Duel between Drona and Arjuna. Drona was teacher of Arjun in archery and other material arts. An incident from Mahabharata.
Gandharvas:	Demigods versed in musical arts.
Ganga—Snana:	Bath in the river Ganga.
Gandhi Punyah:	The date on which Gandhiji first visited Santiniketan
Gour prangan:	Open arena in Santiniketan named after Gourgopal Ghosh
Gurudev:	Divine teacher: Rabindranath Tagore was so addressed by the inmates of Santiniketan.
Halkarsana:	Drawing of the plough, a seasonal function

for flowers in Sriniketan.

Ikbana: Japanese art of farmers arrangement.

Jataka: Stories concerning Bodhisattva's previous births.

Jorasanko: Name of the palatial residence of the Tagore household in Calcutta.

Kashi: Another name of Benaras.

Kabab: Meat chops small in size — spiced and savoury.

Kacha-Devayani (sk): Two legendary lovers from Mahabharata.

Kadambari (sk): Famous Sanskrit prose classic — earliest novel in that language by Banabhatta.

Kaikeyee: Character from Ramayana — one of the three wives of Dasharath.

Kama (sk): Desire.

Karusangha: Crafts union.

Kirti Mandir: Temple of fame: Memorial building raised by Maharaja of Baroda.

Khowai: Land erosions.

Kofta: Meat balls in heavily spiced gravy.

Magh: A winter month in Bengali calendar.

Meera: A medieval female saint from Rajasthan.

Mistri: Technician.

Moksha (sk): Release.

Nati; Actress, danseus.

Natir puja: Name of a dance drama by Rabindranath Tagore.

Natun Bari: Newly built house — (a hut called by that name).

Padmini: A Rajput heroin.

Patha bhawana: School section in Santiniketan.

Pat: A folk painting.

Parvati: Mythological daughter of the Himalayas.

Partha Sarathi: Charioteer of Partha (Arjuna) one of the epithets of Sri Krishna, a character from Mahabharata.

Pinda dan:	Offering of ritual rice-balls to the departed souls for their attainment of peace.
Punyaha:	The blessed day.
Rabindra sangit:	Music composed by Rabindranath Tagore which forms an independent discipline of Indian music.
Sabha:	Meeting.
Sadrisya:	Similar in look, a recognisability of form.
Sati:	One of the names of Parvati.
Sati Paus:	Seventh day of Paus, a winter month according to Bengali calendar. It is founder's day in Santiniketan.
Sal vithi:	Avenue of Sal trees — in Santiniketan.
Shapamochan:	Rabindranath Tagore's dance drama by that name, meaning 'release from the curse'.
Shephali:	An autumn flower with delicate fragrance.
Sisu Vibhag:	Children's section.
Silaidah:	A riverside town on the banks of river Padma-a tributery of the Ganges water system, which went through the large Tagore estates in East Bengal.
Siddha:	One who has attained divinity.
Siddhi:	Attainment of supernatural powers.
Siddhi data Ganesh:	The elephant headed god who is bestower of power and success.
Silpa-Devata (sk):	The presiding deity of art.
Sikhara - (sk):	Crest: an architectural feature of temple: crest of the structure.
Sinha Sadan:	A building names after the donor, Sinha.
Swarup (sk):	Intrinsic form: native form.
Tandava (sk):	Cosmic dance of Siva. A mythological event.
Tapascharya:	Penance, striving.
Trikaleswara:	Lord of the past, the present and the future.

	One of the names of Lord siva.
Uma:	Another name of Parvati.
Upasana:	Service, prayers.
Varshamangal, Vasantotsava, Vriksharopan:	Seasonal festivals celebrated annually in Santiniketan.
Visvanatha Darshan:	Viewing Lord Visvanatha in his temple.
Yashodhara and Rahul:	Wife and son of Siddhartha who attained Buddhahood later.

CHAPTER XXVI

NAMES OF PERSONS REFFERED IN THE TEXT OF THIS BOOK

Abanindranath Tagore:	Leader of the revival movement in art, a distinguished painter and literateur. Nephew of the Poet Rabindranath Tagore.
Asitkumar Haldar:	Painter and classmate of Nandalal, a relation of the Tagores.
Bapu:	Mahatma Gandhi as he was endearingly called.
Binodebehari Mukhopadhyaya or Mukherjee:	Student of Nandalal, distinguished painter and teacher in Kala Bhavan.
Chaitanya:	A medieval religious saint.
Dwijendranath and Surendranath Tagore:	Two of the elder brothers of Rabindranath Tagore.
Gaganendranath Tagore	Elder brother of Abanindranath and a painter.

Ganen Brahmachari: Friend and well wisher of Nandalal, who worked for Sri Ramakrishna order.

Gonvida Basu: grandfather of Nandlal.

Goswami-Nityananda: Scholar of Pali Sanskrit: teacher of Pathabhavan.

Krishnamohan Basu: Great grandfather of Nandlal.

Kshetramani Devi: Mother of Nandalal.

Kasturba: Kasturba Gandhi wife of Mahatma Gandhi.

Kshitimohan Sen: Sanskrit scholar and teacher in Santiniketan. Scholar of the medieval saint poets of Northern India.

Laxman Sen: A medieval historical figure from Bengal.

Mhatre Ganapat: Sculptor from Bombay.

Mukul Dey: Artist and print maker. Former Principal of Art School in Calcutta.

Nishikanto Roy-Choudhury: Artist and poet, ex-student of Kala-Bhavan.

Prabhat Mohan Banerjee: Artist of historical themes and a political worker of early independence struggle.

Purnachandra Basu: father of Nandalal.

Rabindranath Tagore: The poet and Nobel laureate, founder of Santiniketan, honourfically addresed as Gurudev —'divine teacher' by inmates of the asram.

Ramkinkar Baij: Student of Nandalal — teacher in Kala Bhavana — Painter and Sculptor of distinction.

Sister Nivedita: Originally Margaret Noble Irish woman who was disciple of Swami Vivekananda.

Tejesh Chandra Sen: Teacher in Pathabhavan — Santiniketan.

K. Venkatappa and Samarendranath Gupta: Two students of Abanindranath Tagore. Former from the Mysore state and the latter from Bengal, who later worked as Principal of Mayo School of Art, Lahore.

Vidhusekhar Sastri: A Sansktri and Pali scholar and distinguished teacher in Santiniketan.

CHAPTER XXVII

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appasamy, Jaya: *Nandalal Bose — A Tribute*, "Lalit Kala Contemporary—5", New Delhi, Lalit Kala Akademi, p. 30-31.

Appasamy, Jaya: *Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of His Time*, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Akademi, 1968, p.53-59.

Bhattacharya, Nagendra: *Nandalal-50 years Dedication to Painting*, "Roopleka", New Delhi, AIFACS, Vol. 36, No.1&2, p. 138-147.

Bose, Nandalal: *On Art*, Adyar, Kala Kshetra Publications, 1956 (Original in Bengali, Silpa Katha, Calcutta, Visvabharati Publishing Department).

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K.: *Nandalal Bose* Modern Review, a monthly journal, Calcutta, Sept. 1909, p.301.

Das, Ramyansu Sekhar: *Nandalal Bose and Indian Painting*, Calcutta, Tower Publication, 1958.

Gandhi, Mohandas K: Excerpts from his speeches, *Harijan* 11.4.36, 2.1.37 & Visvbharati News Vol. XIV, No. 9.

Kowshik Dinkar: *Nandalal on Rabindranath's painting,* "Nandan", an annual on Art and Aesthetics, Kala Bhavana, Visvabharati 1982, p.39-44.

Kowshik, Dinkar: *End of an Era,* Visvabharati Quarterly, Nandalal number, Vol. 34 (1,2,3,4).

Mukherjee, Binodebehari: *Abanindranath and his Tradition,* "Lalit Kala Contemporary" Vol. 1, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Akademi, 1954, p.36-39.

Mukherjee, Binodebehari: *The Santiniketan School of Art "Nandan"* An Annual on Art & Aesthetics, Kala-Bhavan, Visvabharati, 1982, p.6-17

Ramachandra Rao, P.R.: *Modern Indian Painting,* Madras Rachana Publication, 1953. p. 16-18.

Subramanyan, K.G.: *Nandalal Bose: Artist and Teacher,* "Nandan", an annual on Art & Aesthetics, Kala Bhavana, Visvabharati, 1982, p.13-38.

Venkatachalem, G.B; Banerjee *Comtemporary Indian Painters,* Bombay, Nalanda Publications, p.29-34.

Prabhat Mohan: *Karu Sangha O Jatiya Andolan,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 34-47.

Chakravarti, Kanchan: *Nandalaler Chhapai Chhabi,* "Desh Nandalal" Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 165-168.

Chanda, Rani: *Manush Nandalal,* "Desh" Nanadalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 55-63.

Chaudhuri, Nirode: *Amar Dristrite Nandalal,* "Desh", Nandalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 13-16.

Chowdhury, Satyajit: *Japaner Prerana: Nandalal Bose,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary no. Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 89-96.

Deb Burman, Dhiren Krishna: *Silpa Charchay Nandalal Basu,* 7-12

Guha, Manoranjan: *Gandhiji O Nandalal,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 119-126.

Haldar, Asit Kumar: *Robi Tirtha.*

Mandal, Panchanan: Bharat Silpi Nandalal Bolpur, Rarh Gabesana Parsad, Vol. 1, 1982.

Patri, Purnendu: *Nandalal Basur Grantha Chitran,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982), p. 157-164

Samanta Kanai: *Nandalal Basu,* Calcutta, Katha Silpa publications, 1962.

Sarkar, Sandeep: *Nandalaler Samay,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary No. Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982). p. 176-181.

Subrmanyan, K.G.: *Nandalal Basur Bhittichitra,* "Desh" Nandalal Centenary No., Calcutta, B.S. 1389 (1982) p. 127-130.

Nandalal Special Numbers :

Niriksha — Nandalal number by Niriksha Journal in Bengali published from Behrampur, Bengal, B.S. 1351 (1944).

Visvabharati Quarterly — Published in English from Visvabharati Nandalal number— Vol. 34 (1,2,3,4).

Desh — Vinodana numbers in Bengali, Calcutta, B.S. 1386 and 1389 (1979 and 1982).

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOTES ON ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Saraswati. 1941,
   Tempera on paper.
   A lively sketch work, subdued in colours and black accents. The painting is more like an iconographic design, than a depiction of the goddess of learning. It is in tempera technique, and shows Nandalal at his felicious best.
2. Birth of Chitanya,
   Tempera on paper.
   Nandalal gave up wash technique, and relied more on tempera for its clarity in expression and positive approach to colour. This painting belonging to his more mature days, shows firmness of handling brevity of linear statement, and a balanced organisation of space. These previous exercise he was later to use in his larger mural experiments.
3. Bina Badini,
   Haripura Congress Panel,
   Tempera on paper.
   This is one of the successful Haripura posters in which Nandala makes use of braod pathes of colour areas knit together by playful acents of black and darker lines. The girl playing on Veena is shown in an admirably terse statement, shorn of details.

4. Dandi March (Bapuji),
   Linocut.
   This is the famous lino-cut depicting Mahatma Gandhi White lines of the silhouette are cut with severe economy. The forward step of the figures is echoed parallelly by the firm staff held in hand. This drawing, for the past fifty years has served as a prototype, as an iconographyic model for representations of Gandhiji.
5. A boy with a goat. (Sahaji Path)
   Linocut.
   An illustration for Sahaj-Path, a primer for chilren. It is a lino-cut showing a child pulling a goat. The design is worked with bold divisions of blacks and whites and communicates its message with a touch of humour.
6. A Peacock,
   Pencil on Postcard.
   A lively study of peacock, done in pencil, shows Nandalal as a keen observer of a bird in movement.
7. A Home Tagda,
   Water colour on paper.
   This is a briskly drawns sketch of a hut in an undulating landscape. The strokes of the brush are full of verve, and show various elements of forms in a suggestive way.
8. Sarangiwallar.
   This work from the series of Haripura posters shows amazing brilliance in handling of colours and lines. The figure of a bearded musician playing a difficult traditional instrument with characteristic gesture of his hand and bent of his head is depicted with sure apprehension.
9. Head of Siva.
   The painting almost monochrome in colour is in his early style of work, wherein he was attempting to express ancient gods in modern ironography. His Siva does not echo earlier representations of the god, as seen in early medieval art, or in the Rajasthani, Pahari miniature paintings. Nandalal's Siva is a contemporary interpretation imaged with infelt awareness.
10. Santhal harvest dance.
    A work belonging to his later period, where he relied for his

forms on observation of his surrourdings. Santhals, are a tribal people of Bengal and Bihar living in the early phase of social development by picking and fruit gathering. Santhals are not agricultural by habit, but they offer themselves as wage earning labourers in plantation and harvest work. In this work, a group is shown in a whirl of dance. The sketch is executed with a feeling of immediacy.

District Library
Kala Syingar